

A SERIAL STORY BY FLORENCE HODGKINSON BEGINS NEXT WEEK.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"ANNABEL," ROBERT STANDING SAID, LAUGHING INTO HER EYES, "IT IS SOMEBODY ELSE YOU HAVE BEEN IN LOVE WITH ALL THIS TIME."

## HALF SISTERS

[A NOVELETTE.]

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

### CHAPTER I.



RICH, full, untrained voice was making the air ring with the lilt of an old ditty:—

"Oh, the gipsy's life is full and free,  
A gipsy's life for me!"

"All werry well for he to bawl. He got nothink to do, he ain't, 'cept twist that ere throat about so as to mek folks stare, and the wenches stand gaping s'if all he sings about was true," muttered a sulky, dark-skinned lad,

who was stripping a chicken, his last petty theft, preparatory to immersing it into a seething cauldron, already pretty full of odds-and-ends of savoury meat and herbs.

By the side of the big pond at the far end of a secluded Hampshire village the gipsies had pitched their vagrant tent. The encampment was a favourite one with them, and they well understood the rest and likelihood of good cheer they were in for.

People about here were kind-hearted and unsuspicious; small pigs and stray lambs were procurable at slight risk, and fowls and ducks were in plenty for the mere catching. As for eggs, they were a glut in the free market of these open-hearted and light-fingered marauders.

The fully-rigged tents looked picturesque enough in the gradually fading light of the

peaceful summer evening, and some harassed souls might even envy the swarthy happy-go-lucky figures that loitered and lounged in the appetising odour of the cooking-pan as it simmered under their nostrils, with its promise of succulent contentment yet a little later.

One or two lean, scraggy horses of venerable age stood by looking wistfully, as such creatures do, at the occupation of their betters.

"Now kip well to the sides, old 'uns," said one of their number, with a kindly pat on the high-boned haunches, as he lounged up to them, and taking their shaggy manes led them deliberately into a field of fresh young clover.

As the hissing steam lifted the cover, "Whiner," the queerest type of rough bulldog one ever saw, gravely placed himself further away from the cauldron. With almost human intelligence he looked round for somebody else

to notice that the lid required moving, and an old crone hobbled forward to inspect the situation, whereupon Whiner sniffed hungrily.

"Hist."

Whiner pricked up his ears.

"Hist, I say!"

A very handsome woman, with sparkling black eyes and jetty hair that hung in plaits to her waist, beckoned to the man leaning against the gate of the clover field.

He went forward and followed the direction of her eyes, which were now dancing with mischief. What they saw was two slight girlish figures entering the lane in the direction of the village.

"At 'em, good dog," said the woman in coaxing tones to Whiner, who growled menacingly as her words were enforced by a slight kick.

With a despairing sniff of disappointment towards the pot he started off, well aware that what loomed ahead was *business*.

The two exceedingly pretty girls were terrified at his approach, and the shorter one clung in selfish fear to the younger, but evidently the stronger-minded of the two.

Whiner commenced operations by attacking their small King Charles spaniel, at which, and his cries of distress, the girl screamed afresh.

"Poor Fido! He will be killed, Annabel, and you stand like a stone! Help, help!"

"Oh, thank you. Thank you," was continued, gaspingly, as the handsome gipsy woman came up and called off Whiner, who was quite content to give up such feeble prey, and return to the encampment.

"You are quite safe, my pretty dears!" said the woman, in a sweet, low voice, "and the poor little dawg," taking up the unresisting Fido, "is not hurt a bit, though Whiner is a bit rough at times I'll own. Now, if it had been a cat," laughing till all her gleaming teeth flashed in the pale light, "I'd not have answered for its life."

A shudder shook the pretty trembler, as she took her silver-haired pet from the woman's arms.

"How dreadful," she gasped, "to have dog like that!"

"He suits us, you see, little lady; and now shall I tell your fortune?"

"Yes, pray do! Oh, how lucky, after all, Annabel," said Netta, with sudden and abrupt change of manner. She was interested and alert, and all her fear was gone.

"Surely, Netta," came in unsympathetic tones from Annabel's lips, "you will do nothing so silly! We are already late; let us hurry home."

Netta, pretty, spoiled, wilful Netta, pouted.

"Indeed, I shall not," she said, in defiant tones. "You can go home if you choose, dare say you are quite mean enough to leave me to pass those horrid gip—" Here she blushed and hesitated.

The woman laughed, and once more showed her even white teeth.

"She won't go, dear little lady; but you need not fear passing us all the same. I'll see you by for that matter. Even now as we stand here there is somebody in trouble about you—"

"He is—he is!" cried Netta, impulsively. "You see," scornfully to her companion, "she knows, or how could she speak the truth like this!"

"Ere long another will woo you—for already he thinks of you by day and dreams of you by night. He is tall and dark, and, tracing some lines in the pink palms, "he will be some day very rich indeed. You are fond of money and good living and fine clothes. You will have it all in plenty if you act cautiously now, but," went on the dulcet voice, "I must cross your hand with silver, pretty one."

In a moment Netta's purse, a well-worn one of plain leather, was out, and a shilling put in the gipsy's hand, while the tall Annabel looked on disdainfully.

"How absurd!" she said.

"Hold your tongue, do!" said Netta, exasperated at her coldness. "Cannot you hear she is telling me true?"

She was violently agitated, and her wilful temper would not permit her to listen to caution. Her curiosity burned like a torch within her. She must know more.

"Go on, go on!" she panted. "Do not mind her. She is only jealous."

Annabel's fair face flushed the colour of the reddest of roses, and she indignantly walked on, leaving the two together.

For some time they stood in close proximity, and it was not till Netta discovered that Annabel was out of sight, that her purse was once more ransacked, when she darted away in pursuit. She dared not remain out alone.

"It is mean of you," she panted, as she overtook her just past the encampment; "and you know how frightened I am at gipsies and of the dark."

"Then you should not be so weak and silly."

"You are only angry at what I said; and, after all, it doesn't matter a scrap, and you are always making me say things so—by your stupid, proud, upstanding ways. Why should one not have one's fortune told, pray?"

"As if it is any use!" said Annabel, in her grave, irritating, superior manner. "We all know it is nonsense, and I am not at all sure it is not wicked."

Netta clapped her hands and laughed gleefully.

"Mercy me! How good we are!" she cried, joyously.

Her nature was light, gay, volatile, and eminently selfish. Her moods were quick and variable, so that nothing troubled her long. It was easy to laugh, and on occasions not at all difficult to cry; for Netta Wilding, young as she was and country bred, had already by a cunning wit picked up a few of the world's first lessons. She knew the value of tears when all else failed.

The two, daughters of a plain, tolerably well-to-do farmer, were half-sisters, the children of one father; so it is to be presumed it was the difference in the maternal blood that made their natures so entirely distinct, for Annabel in every respect was the opposite to Netta. Where the one was self-seeking and false, the other was unselfish and true.

Where one was *vain*, the other was *proud*. Netta was distinctly the cleverer of the two in a superficial, half-hearted way. She was prettier, too; and, as she considered, the most fascinating.

She had a subtle knack of railery, that, her object being gained, never failed her in putting the slower Annabel in an untenable position; and she never spared her merry wit, which, foolish though it was, served her turn well in making her appear innocent of guile, while placing others at a discount.

Annabel felt this, but was powerless to refute it and turn the tables upon her enemy, except by a dogged resentment that to the onlooker placed her at a disadvantage.

It was nearly dark now, and the flaming fire of the gipsy encampment cast a strange flickering radiance on the wide pond, the low fields, and the darkening copse which belted in some swelling hills in the distance.

"Oh, dear!" sighed impatient, sentimental Netta, "how prosaic you are, and how distastefully tiring with your sense of what is right and what is wrong. I hate right; it's too tiring for anything."

They were in the wide porch of Park Farm.

"I say, Annabel, you will not tell about the fortune-telling. You know how ridiculously pigheaded dad is about it. And in return I'll do you a good turn some day when I am—"

"Mistress of States Martin," sneered Annabel.

Netta stamped her foot upon the clean-paved brick entrance, for it was so precisely what she

had almost said, and what in her ambitious, foolish breast she, since her talk with the gipsy, well-nigh counted upon as sure.

Annabel was looking with a straight, direct gaze down the homely garden path, through which they had approached the house.

"It will rain soon," she said, rather irrelevantly, as she wiped her feet carefully on the cocoanut mat.

"Bother," snapped Netta. "And who cares a pin whether it rains or shines in this out-of-the-way hole? You are as cold as ice, and just as prim and disagreeable as you can be. I would not be your lover for something!"

"No," said Annabel, slowly smiling, till in the evening gloom she appeared strangely beautiful; "but I would far rather be prim and disagreeable than so ridiculously vain and silly and conceited as you are!"

"Hey-day, gels, you snaggling again, and it's about time you were in bed! What, not had supper yet! What's it all about, eh?"

It was Farmer Wilding's voice, and Netta sprang upon his neck with a sweet impetuosity which effectually checked further grumbling.

"In bed," she pouted, "on such a night as this. And," saucily, "pray where have you been if it comes to that?"

The easy-tempered father laughed at this saily, for it was "Netta's way," and its brightness pleased and tickled his fancy.

"We stayed so long at Aunt Ann's," Netta went on, glibly, "that we forgot the time, and had to run nearly all the way home."

"Humph! Well, get along in now, or we shall have mother scolding us all the way round."

"After you, Miss Prude," whispered Netta, seeing a look of disgust on the pure, fair face.

Entering the comfortable living room, they encountered the full brunt of Mrs. Wilding's thin, querulous voice.

"So you are with your father," she said, in vinegary tones, "so I suppose it is all right, and I must not say a word as to the propriety of two young girls trapesing the fields after dark."

"Don't be hard on the lasses, mother; we were all young once," said Farmer Wilding, putting his child away from him and taking his seat at the plentifully spread board.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to take off your things, and allow supper to be served. Ah, of course, all the starch is out of your clean dresses!"

Mr. Wilding's gimlet eyes spied out such details with irritating quickness, and both girls felt crushed, as they suddenly realised what the treacherous evening damp had done for their pretty costumes.

There was one more inmate of the room to whom, over Mrs. Wilding's shoulder, Netta pulled a comical grimace.

This was a farming pupil of Mr. Wilding, Frank Oliviant, a good-looking, sandy-haired young fellow of twenty or thereabouts.

"I've told Shuffler to look well round to-night, sir," said he, breaking in on the troubled waters, and so hoping to shield the delinquents from further storm, "for there's some gipsies camped up in Willow Lane."

Shuffler was "odd man" about Park Farm.

"The deuce there is!" said Mr. Wilding.

"You must keep an eye on your feathered stock, mother!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," was that lady's rejoinder, "when, if you remember, I lost fourteen young ducks at one go only a month since. These tramps are a disgrace to a Christian country. They ought to be put down by law."

"You gels see anything of 'em?" asked the farmer.

"Oh, yes!" chimed in Netta; "and a nasty horrid dog flew at darling Fido. We were so frightened. How we ran, to be sure! Poor Fido was nearly mad."

Mrs. Wilding looked sharply from one to the other, pursed up her thin lips, and coughed till Netta would like to have shaken her. She was angry, too, with Annabel, who went on eating her supper as calmly as Charlotte



might have cut bread-and-butter while Werther pleaded his love cause.

"All I can say is," went on Mrs. Wilding, "that things are coming to a pretty pass when farmers' daughters can go out and stay away for five or six hours at a stretch, and butter-making day, too. I am strong myself, and able to work. It is a good thing that I was not petted in my youth, to grow up into useless, fine ladyism."

Netta was red-hot with temper by this time, and a retort was only prevented by the thin, harsh voice going on again.

"If you had run fast before you met the gipsies instead of afterwards, my dear, I think it would have been more to the purpose."

"How how much does the spiteful old cat know?" was Netta's inward comment, while Frank Olivant, still looking perplexedly at Annabel, was making much about the same calculation.

But, to everybody's relief, the subject was dropped by the farmer rising from the table—the usual signal in the primitive household that the cloth may be cleared.

It was characteristic of the two girls that Netta should perch her pretty self on a stool at her father's feet, and sit in charming idleness, while Annabel gravely helped Molly, the red-armed serving-maid, to put aside the cruets and fold the delicately clean, if somewhat coarse, tablecloth.

An hour later Annabel, kneeling beside the freshly-smelling tent-bed, with its lavender-scented curtains and sheets, hears a hasty exclamation from Netta.

"Good gracious me! Oh! Annabel——"

As Annabel does not move Netta waits impatiently, and tears are rushing from her excited eyes when they at last meet those of her sister.

"Oh, Annabel! don't get into bed, I'm in such trouble. I've given that gipsy creature my sovereign instead of a shilling. What shall I do?"

The depth of such a calamity startled Annabel out of her calm.

"How could you be so careless?" she asked, aghast.

"I don't know," almost sobbed poor Netta, rummaging yet again in the old leather purse. "It's gone."

"You ought never to carry about a whole sovereign at a time in your pocket," said Annabel, still standing in shocked surprise, and willing to commiserate, but unable from sheer force of habit to help blaming Netta.

"It's no use to argue," sobbed Netta. "What can I do to get it back? Oh, that nasty, horrid, ugly wretch!"

"I thought you considered her so handsome?" said Annabel, lapsing into her usual self again.

"How can you get into bed," cried Netta, angrily, "when I am in such trouble—how dare you?" and she stamped her naked foot on the ground till it smarted again.

"Whatever is the use of staying out of bed?" inquired Annabel. "It will not help you to get it back or prevent your heating of it from mother over and over again till we are sick to death of it."

"She shan't know of it," said Netta.

"She must know of it," argued Annabel. "You see on Tuesday, market day, we are to buy our new hats!"

"She shan't, though," drying up her tears. "Because I shall ask Frank Olivant to give me another——"

"Netta!" almost shrieked poor Annabel, sitting up in righteous horror.

"Good gracious me!" snapped Netta, her eyes ablaze with petty fury at having been so unguarded. "I shall only tell him all about it, and, of course, what can he do but give me another? He is rich, as we all know; a sovereign is nothing to him—just nothing."

"But how can you take it?" asked Annabel. "Have you no pride? What is Frank Olivant to you that you can tell him such a thing, and then demean yourself to take money from him? I am ashamed of you."

And she looked it.

"And, pray, what is he to you?" asked Netta, rudely.

"Nothing at all," was the quiet answer. "Only I don't want, having to live in the same house with him, to be ashamed to look him in the face."

"Don't be such a baby, and get over your own side, do!" as Netta proceeded to prepare for her own rest. "You needn't say any more about it, and I'll never tell you anything again."

"You can ask Uncle Tom."

"Bother Uncle Tom! Yes," apparently considering the proposition, "I can ask Uncle Tom. Good-night."

Annabel could not sleep. The events of the evening had been too exciting, and Netta's proposition to calmly ask Frank Olivant for money staggered her so that, do what she would, she could not rest.

"Netta," she whispered, some time afterwards, "are you asleep?"

"Nearly," was the mumbled response.

"I have thought of a plan, dear. If Uncle Tom can't give you another sovereign you shall have half of mine, and we will have those hats without the feathers, and they are very pretty, you know. Will you promise me not to ask Frank Olivant, but to take my help as I propose?"

"Perhaps I will, dear," said sleepy Netta, quite as if she were conferring some favour on Annabel.

It is a trial, known fortunately to few, to live in a house whose virtual head is of the carping, inconsistent order, whose persistent grievances make the sufferers feel as if their noses were being rubbed on a nutmeg-grater.

Such was poor Mrs. Wilding, and just so did the other inmates of Park Farm feel when her grievances were fully ripe and she metaphorically hung them out to air.

Annabel, in a quixotic, girlish way, realised that under the irritating disagreeable exterior there lurked a certain goodness, and this ensured her respect, so that, however much she suffered, she rarely permitted speech to escape her unless she could put in some palliating word.

She could not be said to love her step-mother, but she was just.

For years past Molly and Sara—the two strapping buxom serving-maids—had determined at times that they could not stay and put up with missus's ways.

The morning following Netta's experience with the gipsy in Willow Lane a smart young fellow swung himself through it, followed by three or four handsome dogs.

He carried a hunting-crop, and with it boyishly swished off the tops of the long grasses and the heads of sundry proud fox-gloves.

As he neared Park Farm he threw aside a half-smoked cigar, and smiled curiously as he glanced round and about, as if to spot one person in especial.

Apparently he was disappointed, and proceeded towards the house through the tall, stately hollyhocks at a leisurely pace, that bespoke him exceedingly well at home in his whereabouts.

"Hello, Mrs. Wilding! busy, as usual?"

"Lor! Sir Guy!" said that lady. "How you do startle one, to be sure! You ain't a bit altered; and fancy you catching me like this!"

"And what matters?" he asked, gallantly. "Pictures must be dusted, I suppose, and why should you not stand on a chair to do it, since your own inches fail you? All the same," he laughed, "you never would let me stand on chairs in the old days, when you tyrannised over me until my life was a burden!"

"Ah, Sir Guy, but, then, what chairs you would choose to ride roughshod over—your poor mother's best tapestry, indeed!"

"Here's a note from the old lady, what I've strolled over for," was his next careless remark; and once more his gaze wandered inquiringly around, as if this errand was not

his only idea in getting himself so far as Park Farm.

"Bless me, Sir Guy! how you do put things," said Mrs. Wilding, standing before the son of her late mistress. "Now, Lady Martin, as a matter of fact, is only two years older than me; and, somehow, I'm always so busy that I lose count of time, and forget how I'm ageing."

"Ah, but you see my poor, dear mater is so fat—the outcome of her idleness, I tell her. Now, you keep your figure. A woman should always keep her figure, Mrs. Wilding, and then she can defy age itself."

Mrs. Wilding involuntarily drew up her flat chest, and was at once in her best mood.

"What is this new trouble she speaks of, Sir Guy?" looking up from the note she is reading.

He laughed again.

"Nothing less than the new railway we are all agog about," he answered; "and she is particularly irate that you, of all people, are encouraging it by having one of the young engineers to board with you. By-the-bye, is it true?"

"So Wilding says," was the answer, slowly given. "It seems that years and years ago he knew something of this young Standing's father, and that's quite enough for Wilding, you see, Sir Guy. It's no earthly use for me to set against it once he sets his mind upon it. I've put it all before him, but see it he won't. He's very easy going is Wilding, up to a certain point, but beyond that—well, even you, as a young lad, wasn't more stubborn."

"All what have you put before him?" inquired Sir Guy, with a curious twist of his full lips.

"Well, Sir Guy, for one thing, it will not be pleasant for me to feel there is no spare bedroom in the house."

"And another thing?" still with the slow smile that, somehow, made his face so unpleasant.

Mrs. Wilding looked at him in silence.

"Come, Mrs. Wilding," he said, "you are a sensible woman! You are thinking about his girls, and quite right too. By-the-bye, is young Olivant on the square?"

"Oh, there's no danger of Frank Olivant, Sir Guy, no danger at all; but who knows what this fashionable young engineer may be? But, as I say, it's Wilding's business, not mine. I am not the mother of his girls. As for that poor silly, shallow-pated Netta, I tremble for her! Annabel is sensible!"

"And will be a very beautiful woman some day."

"Sir Guy!" in some astonishment.

"Ay, she will; not yet, but by-and-by. You mark my words, when Netta is a round about little matron, with half-a-dozen children at her apron strings, Annabel Wilding will be a beauty."

## CHAPTER II.

Sir Guy Martin left Mrs. Wilding rather abruptly after ascertaining she would obey the behest in his mother's letter to come up to States Martin in the afternoon.

His far-reaching eyesight had discerned two girlish forms rounding the stackyard, each carrying a basket suggestive of eggs and poultry feeding.

His dogs leaped on in front of him, madly rushing to pay their canine *devoirs* where apparently his were due.

"Down, Metaphor, down!" cried Netta, in affected, shy alarm, holding her basket of freshly-gathered eggs as high above her head as she possibly could. "Oh! Sir Guy, do call them off! If we smash these treasures we shall be in for a tremendous row. The home temperature is very unsettled!"

Annabel accepted his greeting with no such merry fooling, but sedately, as was her wont. She blushed hotly, 'tis true, but that was at remembrance of the gipsy encounter of the previous evening, and of what the woman had predicted for her sister Netta—for Netta, who

apparently took every word for gospel truth, and was prepared to act, in consequence, a still more foolish part than usual.

And how dazlingly pretty she looked in the sweet, warm morning stillness! Her rounded cheeks were flushed with Sol's bright glances, till they resembled nothing so much as ripe peaches waiting to be plucked. And her saucy eyes challenged Sir Guy's with, as Annabel thought, hotly, unmaidenly openness.

"You are almost as busy, Miss Annabel, as I found your redoubtable mamma-in-law, or stepmother, isn't it? Not quite the same thing, now I come to think of it," said Sir Guy, laughing.

They were all leaning idly on the stackyard-gate, and the cheery sounds of busy, regular farm life made a pleasant soothing music that was certainly not conducive to any feeling but pure indulgence of that sense known as *dolce far niente*.

Netta pettishly swung her sun bonnet over the gate, wilfully inviting some tiny pigs on the other side to compete for its possession. And still Sir Guy talked quietly to Annabel.

"Are you courting sunstroke, Miss Wilding?" he asked presently, carefully displacing the ash from his cigar.

"No," was the answer, given sullenly.

"And so you did not have your fortune told last night?" he said, suddenly, to Annabel.

Both girls perceptibly started.

"Ah!" he laughed. "I saw you, and perhaps I heard all about it!"

"At any rate," said Annabel, coolly, "you heard no ridiculous nonsense about me, for I walked on and left them."

"Yes; you were a veritable Miss Peasley!"

At which Netta giggled, and her good humour partially returned; but something had offended her, and she was not altogether appeased.

"Why," she was thinking, "should he dare to talk to Annabel and to turn me into ridicule before her, when behind her back he calls her a prude and all manner of things? I hate her, and I hate him!"

But here the hot tears scorched the blue eyeballs, for she knew she was telling herself an untruth; for, alas! so much as she knew of love was given unreservedly to this cool, sneaking man, who stood carelessly chaffing with them at their father's gate.

"Let me see your hand, Miss Annabel! I am somewhat of a palmist. Have been reading up the thing lately. I daresay I could give you already far more reliable information than the gipsy did Miss Netta, and—I will not charge you anything, for my science does not require the hand to be crossed with silver."

"Or with gold!" said Annabel, quickly, and then she bit her lip hard, having said more than she intended.

"I mean," she went on, noticing Netta's angry countenance, "that poor Netta had great misfortune, and gave some gold in mistake for silver. It is a misfortune," she said, simply. "One should not carry gold about."

"Now," said Sir Guy, "do not let it trouble you. By Jove! that woman shall give up her ill-gotten gains, or I will know the reason why."

"Can you make her, really?" asked Annabel and Netta almost in one breath.

"Of course I can," he answered, "if I like to take the trouble, and I will in this case. You see, I was an eyewitness to the interview—heard something of it, as it happens," here Netta blushed furiously again, "and I watched till I saw that little fool Fido was out of danger. I did not give him to Miss Netta for him to be gobbled and shaken by a stray mongrel like that fellow they call Whiner. They are only in the next village, and I will ride over and get back that—sovereign or half-sovereign, was it?"

"A whole sovereign!" broke in Netta,

excited at the thought of recouping her loss. "The nasty thing must have known."

"Oh, well, they have a wholesome horror of exposure. Fortune-telling is illegal, you know, young ladies, so I warn you. If you require the cash before I can get it from her allow me—"

"Oh, no!" cried Annabel, with flashing eyes, "we can wait."

"All right," removing his hand from his pocket. "How particular we are!"

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be," quoted Annabel, pleasantly.

She, too, was glad to see a prospect of Netta's ill-fortune being honourably tided over without ultimate loss.

"Miss Annabel Wilding," said Sir Guy, with irrepressible amusement, "you should really have a tub in the market-place to air your rather far-fetched ideas."

"But it is dishonest," said Annabel, stubbornly.

"Not necessarily." Sir Guy was not a trifle nettled. "It is mostly a matter of pure accommodation, as it would have been had I advanced you this sovereign," holding out one, "and repaid myself with one taken from that thievish gipsy. It is merely a matter of time in this case; and let me tell you, Miss Honesty Straightlace, that had you required the immediate use of the money you would have been very stupid indeed not to have taken it."

Netta hesitated to take the coin, although her pretty eyes looked greedily at its tempting brightness. Annabel was staggered by his reasoning, and so stood mute.

She hardly knew that, as he had put it, she would not have taken it now. Of course, as he said, he would get it back again for the asking, or else what was the use of his being a J.P.?

Here one of the small pigs got hold of the lower frill of Annabel's dress, and vigorously commenced trying to pull it through the gate, so that her attention was distracted.

"Take it, Netta, and don't be such an arrant little fool," said Sir Guy, in a low, hard voice, "or you will make me really angry!"

For a moment her eyes met his, and something makes her gaze falter, while he laughs loudly at the antics of the disappointed pig, for by this time the pink frills are released from his grasp.

"I am waiting to see your hand, Miss Annabel," leaning his broad back on the gate.

Mechanically the pink palm was held out, but Netta saw nothing to be amused at in the eager way in which it was taken and studied.

"These lines," pointing to some upright creases on the upper part, "are—"

"Just nothing at all," snapped Netta, rudely. Her weak, jealous temper overcame her utterly, and she nearly cried.

"Oh, oh! easy now; they show me a great deal. There is a stranger coming into your life, Miss Annabel—"

"Oh! it is all the same old rigmarole," said Annabel. "I thought you were going to read my character, not tell my fortune. I do not believe in that, but in chiromancy and phrenology there must be something."

"Are you interested in the science?" he asked, quite gravely. "I firmly believe in it myself, and have been reading the greatest authority known on the subject. If you think you can tackle the book I will send it down."

"Oh, thank you!" said Annabel, her whole face glistening with pleasure.

Netta's brow was getting more and more lowering, and unable to bear this fire of cross-purposes. She was not a well-bred little girl, you see, despite the Southampton boarding-school. She deliberately turned her back on the two, and proceeded with quick steps towards the house.

She tore her dress skirts passionately from some clinging current bushes as she wended her way indignantly without once glancing back.

Her rich under-lip was severely bitten; her heart was hot and restless with foolish, unreasoning jealousy, and the pretty, childish eyes were full of tears.

The jar of her own feelings overmastered her, and she was blind to everything that should have healed her trouble. Such troubles are very sore—let none dispute it—and poor little Netta Wilding's nature was thoroughly undisciplined, selfish, and intolerant withal, so that she could ill brook defeat—and defeat of a sort was hard upon her just then by reason of her weakness.

In a word, she lacked the *aplomb* which the world only gives to women to combat on equal terms with such a man as Sir Guy.

"Why should he hurt me so?" was her bitter reasoning. She did not know the cruel lesson that such as he "love to afflict."

The front gardens of Park Farm were of the sweet, old-fashioned sort that so well fits the solitary homesteads, of which this was the truest type.

Half flower borders, half herb borders, half fancy fruit bushes outlined by trim box edges; the whole interlaced with wire fences, on which creepers and roses bloomed in their regular and appointed turns. The paths which wound in and out amongst it all were of softest grass, well-kept and broad.

A cool brick pathway ran the whole length, dividing this garden from the low-thatched house, and this Netta had barely reached when Annabel, having walked very quickly, overtook her.

"Netta, you are to go back and say goodbye to Sir Guy."

"Indeed I shall not!"

"Very well. At least, I have delivered his message. He is waiting."

"Let him wait," but hesitating palpably, "just as long as he likes. I don't care."

"I daresay," said Annabel, rather provokingly, it must be confessed, "he will survive even that in the gaieties of town. He goes by the early coach to-morrow."

Poor Netta was startled out of all seeming by this unlooked-for intelligence, and crying, "Oh, do take my basket!" flew back through the box edgings and tall hollyhocks to where Sir Guy still stood by the stackyard gate.

"Well!" was his only greeting.

She stood before him—a startled, repentant flushed little figure, her chest heaving with repressed sobs, and the bright eyes flooded with moisture.

"Desperately pretty, by Jove!" was his inward comment. "Like a partridge at bay, and about as helpless."

"How well passion, to say nothing of jealousy, becomes you, little one!" said he, at last. "And now what is it all about—this tempest in a teapot?"

She could not command her voice to answer him, but dashed away her tears and smiled into his eyes, deprecating their coldness. She half-put out her tiny hand, but he did not choose to see it, although had he taken it the spot they were in was secluded enough.

He was a handsome man, after a certain style, and this is saying much, for the style was not inviting as to trust or general goodness of heart. There was a mocking cynicism in his manner at times that reflected itself on his countenance so that it was repellent. It was so now, and Netta Wilding weakly shuddered.

"How can you be so cruel to me?" she asked, in low, shaky tones, finding silence too painful to be borne.

"Cruel, child," he said, hurriedly, through his set teeth. "It is you who are silly—a silly, childish little idiot."

Netta, instead of being offended, was hugely flattered, and swift blushes flushed her fairness into renewed beauty under his critical examination.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, uncomfortably.

"Because, silly one, you are fairer than most of the daughters of men. Have I not told you as much hundred of times, and yet



you flout me? It is I who ought to be jealous, if it comes to that."

She slid her hand into his, and the light of gratified vanity irradiated her like a halo. She preened herself in the sunlight of his doubtful praise as a peacock might have done his glories of covering to an adoring sun which shone on all alike, but on none so glittering as he.

What was love? she wondered as she looked fixedly at her tormentor who could thus rend her heart in twain, and smile into her questioning eyes the while.

It is a question which older women that she have so often asked in vain.

Suddenly he grasped the small, trembling hands, with a touch she knew full well—with a touch that thrilled her to the core, and she faintly realised some truth in his words that she was a silly little idiot.

A momentary strength, born of something good and true within her, gave her power to withdraw her hands from his, and to draw up her small rounded figure with a dignity very foreign to its usual coquettish abandon.

A dark shade crossed his face—so far above her own, for young Sir Guy Martin was a very tall man, and Netta only stood five feet in her shoes. Perchance in that moment he may have experienced some feeling of regret for the ignoble part he was playing. Who knows?

But her next words killed it. Sir Guy had never denied his fancy a thing in his life, and it scarcely behoved him to be quixotic now when such tempting fruit dangled within his reach.

"Sir Guy! oh, Guy! you are not going away—to leave me without a good-bye!"

"Unless you so will it, child—no!"

A quivering sigh was Netta Wilding's only answer.

"Why," she asked, affecting some of her ordinary coquettish petulance, "do you tease me so by talking to Annabel?"

"So this is the trouble, eh?"

"You know it is, not attempting dignity now."

"I wanted to see by her hand whether this young engineer that is coming has to do with her life or yours, only you always jump to wrong conclusions, like the silly which you know you are. Tell me what you know or have heard about him?"

"Netta, half pleased and half scornful, pretended to look thoughtful, and puckered up her low forehead, till Sir Guy laughed again."

"Nothing," came the answer. "Only that did used to know something of his father long ago; and that is why he is going to take him to live with us instead of putting him up at the Martin Arms."

"A very good change for him, I should say."

"He seems to think so—he wants stabling for two horses and a tub."

"Oh!" still laughing, "he don't belong to the great unwashed, then? A pretty good sort of fellow, I should say."

"Of course, mother is making herself cantankerous," and Netta laughed shyly.

"She is a wise woman, and scents trouble in the doveot. Let me tell you she is in this case near about right, little one. Mind what you are about, that's all, or you will have me to reckon with. Mrs. Wilding—"

"The ferret!" corrected Netta, demurely. Her good humour was quite restored by now.

"Is coming up to the house this afternoon."

"And I am going back to Uncle Tom's," said Netta, with a quick, upward glance.

"Exactly so; and you will find the walk through Atherley Woods pleasanter than the road, eh?"

"You are not going away?" asked the girl, eagerly, as he opened the gate to depart on his homeward way. "I mean, you are not leaving home to-morrow?"

"I am; but only for a few days. I shall tell a certain little woman all about it if I find her walking in Atherley Woods at three o'clock this afternoon. By-bye!"

He went leisurely off, lighting another cigar, his dogs obediently following his foot-

steps, and Netta waited for one backward glance in vain.

But now she was not unhappy, and could sing lightly as she went once more through the heavy-leaved currant bushes and box edges.

And then, leaning against the wide brown-wooded old porch, Netta went into so much of a thoughtful reverie as her volatile nature ever permitted.

Shading her sunny eyes with her hand, she gazed across the open fields that lay before her father's house—beyond them to a line of dark copees bordering Atherley Wood—past this again to where some imposing chimneys broke the sky line, States Martin.

And a gleeful smile crossed the pretty face, and the plump hands were clasped together in a mute ecstasy. He loved her, and it was not the first time such as he had married one of what the world called low degree.

In all her favourite books the heroes did so, and why not her hero, handsome Sir Guy, of States Martin?

### CHAPTER III.

At dinner Netta's face was a study in facial development, had Mrs. Wilding only known it, when that lady announced that if she went back to her uncle's that day she could not have the gig, but must walk.

"Already," thought that astute little dame, "the gipsy's prophecy begins to work."

"I can walk quite well, mother, if Shuffler can bring over my box by-and-by."

"Yes; and you needn't go early, so as to get tired and hot. After I am gone you and Annabel can help Molly pick gooseberries. Of course, by going to Homelands—Uncle Tom's house—you will slip out of helping in making the jam."

Mrs. Wilding read Netta and all her little selfishnesses correctly, and never spared her the knowledge that she did so.

"I daresay Aunt Susan will be making some," said Netta, willing to make petty conversation, for her heart was singing blithely within her. Pick gooseberries! Not she, when Atherley Wood waited for her, and her lover would be there.

"As if you did not hear me read her note this morning that she was beforehand with me, and had finished the gooseberries! And you also know that all fruit ripens quicker by a few days at Homelands than it does here; but that is not my fault," with a sour sort of apology that if she could have arranged it differently it might have been done better.

"You are very clever, Netta, and I daresay when cherry and strawberry time comes you will dodge your visiting quite as well, but you don't escape the picking to-day; and mind, Annabel, that I find them all ready topped and tailed ready for the stewpan at eight to-morrow morning."

"She'll have her work well cut out," thought idle Netta, mischievously, knowing full well that there would be no help of hers given in the picking or topping and tailing of the fruit in question.

Eating the preserve farther on would be quite another pair of shoes, and Netta was exceedingly sweet-toothed, and was, her step-mother always declared, wofully extravagant with jam.

Frank Oliviant offers to drive the light cart over with her box after he returns from Southampton, and Netta carelessly accepts, so that is settled.

Evidently the handsome gipsy was right in saying that her way to riches and grandeur was to be smoothed for her.

Another smile crosses her face later on when she wonders how Sir Guy is going to be in Atherley Woods and at the next village to get her sovereign back from the gipsy at the same time.

All the same, she need not worry about that. She is not the loser, and some day all his sovereigns will be hers by right.

At two o'clock precisely Mrs. Wilding started in high feather for States Martin. This ex-

pedition was with her always an imposing ceremony. She drove herself in her husband's roomy gig, and the mare had on her new harness.

As she disappeared through the stackyard to the road gate Netta made certain facial grimaces that very much amused Mr. Frank Oliviant—for Mrs. Wilding, although he stood in great awe of her, was no favourite of his. He always breathed freer when she was out of the house, that is if he were in it, and vice versa.

"Shall I help you two with the gooseberry picking?" asked the young fellow, kindly, and blushing violently under his sandy locks.

"If you like you may," said Annabel; "but I thought you were going to Southampton?"

"Not till four o'clock, Miss Annabel, and we can get heaps of gooseberries picked by that time. As to the top and tailings I don't know what that is."

"Oh! you'll learn that along with other items of farming, etc., all in good time," laughed the girl pleasantly, for she and Frank Oliviant were always good friends and on pleasant terms.

"It's picking off the horrid little brown tufty noses and the beastly little green tails that stains your finger nails, so that nothing short of lemon juice or ammonia gets them clean again," said Netta, merrily. "Catch me top and tailing gooseberries."

They all accepted this statement in perfect good faith, for Netta's tricks were well known. Annabel had never thought for a moment that she intended to help, and so was all the more pleased to accept Frank Oliviant's proffered aid.

The sturdy young fellow marched away forthwith to get the open wicker fruit baskets, so that they might begin at once, and so ease Annabel's labours as much as might be.

With them he brought over his arm her large garden hat, and as she tied it under her chin he noticed how delicate and white her slender, long-fingered hands were.

The nails were filbert-shaped and cut to perfection, for, despite much useful work, Annabel was particularly dainty in all such feminine niceties.

"I'll bring you back some ammonia, Miss Annabel. It's lucky I am going into town, and I can get a few lemons, too."

"You had better stick to the ammonia, Mr. Oliviant," said Netta, who was disposed to flirt and chatter with him as better than nobody till the time came for her to depart, "because carrying lemons on horseback is difficult; they will bulge your pockets out, and make you look as if you had hip disease."

"Well, I haven't," he said, rather sulkily, for he did not quite like being chafed, "and I don't mind looking a bit bulgy, if it comes to that, so that Miss Annabel can get her pretty nails clean. Fruit does play the deuce with staining things."

He was hard at work by this time picking the hairy red Warringtons with a vengeance. The basket promised fullness in no time. Annabel, too, was deftly filling hers, so that already the bottom of it was fairly covered.

As for Netta, she was swinging hers on one arm, and with the other hand was selecting only the very finest specimens of fruit, and these she transmitted not to the basket, but to her mouth.

"Oh, dear!" she said, presently, "how hot it is, and I must be going in to get ready. I haven't packed yet," which was a fib, for she had hastily bundled her belongings together before dinner, and only had to cram in the dress she was taking off.

"All right!" said Annabel, from underneath a rare old gooseberry tree.

"And if I don't see you again," she cried back over her shoulder—she had no intention of doing so—"I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye—good-bye!" came from both the busy fruit-pickers, and manoeuvring Netta was free.

She danced along the brick pavement with lightsome steps, through the porch and up the dim old stairs into their white, daintily

trimmed bed-chamber, where stood her small open trunk, and on that tent bedstead a clean, blue-specked muslin, which was to replace the pink gingham now so tumbled and soiled.

It was the work of a few minutes to pull off the soiled gingham and deposit it in the trunk, which she carelessly shut, leaving the cord beside it.

She briskly laved her face in clear cold water, and smoothed the soft brown hair, and adjusted the natty straw hat at the precise angle that suited her arch face. The blue muslin became her well, and she started with no more good-byes for Atherley Woods.

The thought of riches was simply intoxicating to this village beauty, to whom a sovereign was now a large sum. She had visions of untold grandeur in the word wealth, and saw herself mistress of fairy-like castles, that, though reared in the air, seemed to her bright fancy not insecure of foundation.

She tripped onwards with happy face, and singing stray snatches of her many songs, all of more or less a sentimental character. Her voice was full and very pretty to listen to, being tolerably true.

She ran short races with Fido, exciting him to madness, at which she herself capered with delight, till presently she bethought herself of her coming dignity, and walked more sedately.

"My lady," she said to herself, "my lady! And then I shall never wear frumpy old gowns like his mother does. I shall always have peach-coloured silks and satins and laces; and if I wear muslins and cottons, then they will be trimmed with embroideries like those Madame Lucy makes for the Castle people.

Here she looked with blighting disdain at the simple frock of pale, specked muslin, with which not so long ago she had been fully content.

And they would travel about a great deal, for Sir Guy had once told her that when he was married he should travel, so as not to be much at States Martin while the old lady lived.

Now Netta felt in a generous mood as she stepped quickly over the mossy road towards the copse. She did not at all wish the old lady to die, for she should enjoy travelling so much, especially as she pictured the state in which it would be her lot to travel as "my lady!"

And, in all probability, she would have to be presented at Court. This thought completely staggered her with its glories.

And how should she ever bow, as she had heard they did, so low, and yet keeping the body in an almost straight line? She had learned dancing as taught at the academy at Southampton, but the practisings of the ordinary courtesies as executed there must be very different to Court bows to their Majesties.

She was preparing to try one of these bows before a spreading old oak when she was startled by Sir Guy's voice.

"What on earth are you at, little one? and what the devil have you brought that yapping little cur to proclaim our whereabouts to every passer-by for?"

"Don't abuse him," said Netta, a little abashed, but pleased still, "since you gave him to me."

"Instead of having it more properly disposed of," still a little fretfully. "For some reason he was annoyed to have the small animal at their heels to-day."

"How, Sir Guy?"

"Drowned, of course, as the rest of the litter was."

He had linked his arm carelessly in hers; and was entering the wood by this time—into the darkest and dimmest portion of it, where they had spent so many hours unknown to any living soul but themselves.

Netta was just a trifle quenched by his cool and careless tone, but tried her best to be equal to the occasion.

A sudden quail came over her that his near presence, instead of strengthening her air castles, made them topple perilously.

"My lady" did not seem so real to her under his half-mocking air.

"And wherefore so gay to-day?" he asked, seating her beside a purring rivulet and at the foot of a big tree. "Clean frocks, new waist-band, best hat?"

"I put it on because you like this blue colour," said she, brightly, "and Annabel had it got up so nicely for me."

"It strikes me, miss, you get Annabel to do a good lot for you. Now tell me why, in fortune's name, she should get-up—iron, don't they call it!—dresses for you? I'll be bound you don't do hers."

"She won't let me," pouting, "because she irons so much better than I do."

He laughed, giving her a careless kiss.

"You will have to pick out the richest of your lovers, Miss Netta, for a husband, for you are desperately inclined to be extravagant, let me tell you. Now I wonder if the young engineer is rich—richer than young Olivant or as Jabez Stubbs?"

"Don't," said Netta, hurt and angry, "and you are crushing my dress. Let me go."

"Tell me if jealousy of Annabel was the only thing that made my little one sulky this morning?" Netta looked sharply at him, for there was something underneath his tone now which she did not in the least understand. "Had she nothing else to fret her? Any village gossip, for instance?"

"Ah, well! instead of being fretted it may please you, for aught I know! At any rate, it will give your village lovers a chance; although I flattered myself you would feel a bit rusty."

Netta leaned over him as he lay at her feet in the sweet, mossy grasses, and whispered:—

"I shall never be vexed at anything, Sir Guy, dear Guy, while you are good and kind to me!"

He drew a hard breath of intense relief—she had heard then. He suddenly pulled down the pretty pale face to his, and kissed it again and again with a passionate vehemence he had never shown before.

She was frightened, and trembled like a leaf in his arms, murmuring in distressed accents:

"Don't, don't, oh! pray don't, Sir Guy." "By Jove! Netta, you are a brick!" he said at last. "You have more pluck than I thought you had."

After a fashion she had. His words rang truer than he would have considered it possible.

"What do you mean?" she questioned anxiously. "I cannot understand you to-day."

"I mean what I say, child—that you are more plucky than I thought you were."

"I don't know what in the least you mean."

"Nonsense, little one."

"Please don't tease me any more." She was very near crying now.

"All right, little one," kissing her again. "Let us be sensible and have it out. I thought you would have cut up rough, and treated me to overdoes of virtuous indignation and all that old-fashioned balderdash. After all, you will always know that it is you I love."

Netta's face was pale to ghastliness. "What is it?" she gasped, moistening her dry lips painfully.

With wide eyes she stared at him—her lover—fixedly, and all the sweetness and goodness of life seemed ebbing away from her in a dark flood.

"Don't be idiotic, child—it is too late to put on mysterious airs. You know there is an old saying somewhere that in the world 'men marry where they do not love, and love where they do not marry.'"

"Yes, go on."

"Well," he said, "between you and me marriage is nowhere—love gets the best of it." He tried to take her in his arms, but she resisted violently. She was beginning to understand.

"What is it?" she asked, nervously, "that you think I have heard? Tell me."

"Tut, child; about my marriage, of course."

"Your—marriage," came in low, painful accents from the poor, white, quivering lips.

"I never knew—I never heard."

"It was all over the village yesterday. The Castle lot took precious good care of that, with angry vehemence, as he tried over again to encircle her with his arms."

But she sprang aside. The movement did her good, and enabled her to steady her falling pulses, and to control her voice.

"What have I ever done?" she asked, steadily, "that you should insult me so?"

Even Annabel could not have looked more unapproachable or more queenly, and Sir Guy felt that, after all, he had not made a correct reading of Netta Wilding. He certainly had never admired her so much before.

For once in his life he was cowed, and at a loss for words.

"I see now," went on Netta, "how silly I have been, but," and her eyes flashed fire, "I am not quite the stupid fool you take me for. Did you think," stamping her foot resolutely, "that I had no pride?"

He did not answer.

"You are a bad man. It is you who are a silly fool, not me."

"Well done, Pamela," he said, finding his voice all of a sudden. "You are doing it splendidly. By Jove, Miss Wilding, you should go on the stage. Would you like it, Netta?" with startling seriousness. "If so, I will make the way easy for you, and we can be happy yet. Here you are not in your proper element, and we shall be hampered at every turn by the domestic virtues and all the rest of it."

He had risen and stood beside her, and his eyes, too, were shining with excitement as yet again he strove to caress her as of old.

"No," she cried, with fine scorn, "never again shall you touch me. I hate you. I cannot tell you how much I hate you!"

Her intense and sudden disappointment was giving her strength to defy him. But how long would this fictitious strength hold out?

"You will never be happy with Lady Maria—never!" she said, scornfully. "She is old and ugly—"

"Oh, come, come, not so bad as that. Most people say she is handsome, although I confess I don't like big women myself, but that is as it may be."

"And I will always pray that your home may be never blessed with joys of any sort, that you may never have an heir to the wide lands of States Martin—that your name may die out, and that you may—"

Here she almost broke down, but his sneering voice backed up her taunting courage.

"You are doing it splendidly, Miss Wilding. Do not disdain my offer of putting you on the stage. It is decidedly your *métier*."

"I will not be put on the stage or anywhere else by you," drawing up her small figure with consummate pride.

"What shall you do?" he inquired, affecting a blandness he was far from feeling.

For a moment she hesitated, meeting his mocking gaze unflinchingly, and then said:

"I shall marry the first man that asks me!"

"Pooh! Don't be ridiculous."

"I swear that I will do as I say," she answered, stolidly, and Sir Guy Maria saw clearly that if her present mood held out—a mood he had never expected to find in Netta Wilding, hitherto his weak, pliant tool—she would do as she threatened.

"Yes," she went on, her voice grown quite steady now. "You shall never come back here to pity the poor fool, the silly creature, who lived lonely because she once loved you—"

with biting emphasis.

At that moment Sir Guy would have willingly foregone his marriage with the high-born Lady Maria had it been possible, for he knew that he really and truly loved this low-born maiden, who suddenly, under stress of



cruel circumstance, proved herself of nobler stuff than he had thought.

The discovery gave him a shock of repulsion that boded ill for the happiness of the future lady of States Martin. Not that Lady Muriel Mountcastle would have cared a jot one way or the other. Her object was simply to be mistress of States Martin, and that was assured.

"And now go—go at once."

As he essayed to take her hand in some sort of farewell reasoning, Netta added furiously:

"Go at once, Sir Guy, or I will scream aloud."

As he picked up his light overcoat from the ground Netta gave it a slight kick, which action struck him like a blow. Never had he felt so poor a creature.

As he turned away he knew in his very heart of hearts that so long as he lived he should love this farmer's pretty daughter, who had dared to spurn him even with a kick of her arched foot, for now—he respected her.

Poor little vain, frivolous Netta. She had had a rude awakening from her empty visions of high-flown bliss. She stood as if petrified, gazing at his retreating form till it was lost amidst the branching foliage of the trees.

Once more he does not look back. Had he done so, and met that wild despairing gaze, the course of two lives might have been altered and nothing more of this story had remained to be told except the old well-worn formula, "and they married and lived happily ever after."

She fell to the ground with a low cry as he disappeared from view, and she realised that she was left utterly alone.

No one but a woman so cheated and so left, who has by the treachery of a man missed a great happiness, fully knows the meaning of that simple-sounding word—alone.

#### CHAPTER IV.

How long she lay thus she never knew, but she presently felt Fido licking her hands and then her face, and whining pitifully.

She sat up, dazed and half-unconscious still. The afternoon shadows were lengthening in the winding vistas of the woods, and the scent of the woodland flowers were heavy on the senses, as they become just before they close their sweetness for the night's repose.

Fido frisked around her in mad doggish delight, to hear her voice again. His antics roused a senseless fury in her over-wrought mind. Why should he—a mongrel cur he had called it—be so happy and gay when she was sick to death with misery?

She loosened her silk scarf, and twisting it tightly to its neck she carried him to the centre pool of Atherley Wood, which she knew to be deep and cold.

Picking up with nervous haste a huge stone she inserted it in the folds of the silken scarf, and without looking once at the dog's eyes she threw him from her into the dank pool, and rushed wildly away, that she may not see him sink.

Weakly she staggered back to the tree under which she had sat with her false-hearted lover, and sank down, sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she cried, "my dear love." On the ground lay a glove of stolen tanned leather. She caught it up, and kissed it passionately. Then the blind, unreasoning, senseless passion of a wilful and weak nature seized her again, and she tried to read it in pieces, and panted with impatient anger that it was beyond her power.

While thus employed she heard a shambling tread, and turned to face—Jabez Stubbs, the rich millowner, whom both her father and Uncle Tom were anxious she should marry.

The man was sufficiently young and good-looking enough, as simple country folk count looks. He was rich, and could give her a fine new home and a carriage. What did she want more?

She returned his rather shy "good-evening" with a start of unaffected surprise. Was it so

late! Yes, the evening shadows were creeping in and out amidst the trees. She had left Park Farm hours ago, and should have been at Homelands long since.

She stuffed the unyielding leather glove into her pocket, thinking "how different this man is to Sir Guy!—how exactly the opposite to what that lying gipsy had promised she should marry."

Was it only yesterday that happened in Willow Lane? It seems to her now to have happened months ago.

"You are alone, Miss Netta, and it's getting a bit late," said Jabez Stubbs, to whom speech never came with pleasant readiness.

"Have you lost your way?" he continued, vaguely. "These paths are a bit bothersome."

"I—I believe I have," said Netta, wearily, "lost my way," and she smiled a poor little sickly faint smile, but one that somehow cheered Mr. Stubbs wonderfully.

"You are a bit out of sorts, Miss Netta. Have you been ill?" he asked, tenderly enough, wondering in his mind just what was up to change her so.

"I really don't know, Mr. Stubbs," she made answer, hopelessly. "I think it is—the heat."

"You are tired, maybe?" was his next query, and his nervousness grew upon him.

"Yes," she said, in a thin, despairing voice, which, being utterly new to him, was fraught with joyful meaning. "I am tired of everything—tired to death."

And then Jabez Stubbs, a heavy-headed, good enough fellow in the main, pleaded his cause not unmanfully; and Netta Wilding, in sweet Atherley Woods—on the exact spot where Sir Guy had parted from her—listened dumbly to love vows which she at least knew were honest and true; and, without dreaming the great wrong she was doing him, presently made slow, distinct answer, while her heart contracted with a shuddering fear born of its intense pain:

"Yes, I will marry you whenever you like, only"—and this between lips that shook as if with palsy—"please let it be soon."

A week later, when everyone had grown accustomed to the news that Sir Guy Martin was to be married in London to the proud Lady Muriel Mountcastle, and that Farmer Wilding's eldest daughter was to marry Mr. Jabez Stubbs, the rich miller, the lamp was lighted rather earlier than usual in the cheerful living room of Park Farm, for the new inmate, the young engineer, was momentarily expected.

He and his father were coming from Southampton in time for supper, and supper was ready this quarter of an hour or more, and now Mrs. Wilding had left Annabel to put the finishing touches to the bouquet of flowers that stood on the centre of the table in a high-cut celery glass, while she went upstairs to see, for the hundredth time, that the best spare bedroom was in complete readiness.

There was a crunching sound on the gravel by the stackyard gate, and Annabel looked out of the porch to see, in the shadowy light, an open hired carriage with two men in it, and her father and Frank Oliviant standing beside them in light conversation as they dismounted.

The two old gentlemen came on first towards the house, and behind them she saw that the stranger within their gates was a much taller fellow than Frank Oliviant, and that he walked with an air that bespoke him of considerably more importance.

Perhaps it was quite natural that Frank Oliviant, being so far a resident of the house, should carry the manifold rugs and travelling impediments of the new comer; still Annabel was vaguely angry to see that he should also burden himself with an ungainly three-legged sort of contrivance, which she discovered afterwards was called a theodolite.

Mrs. Wilding was at the front door in hospitable country fashion to meet them, and young Mr. Standing, erect and bareheaded

under the porch lamp, was not a bad figure to look at.

There was unmistakable power in his general physique, and in his manner there was a hearty brave assurance that won him friends at once, and warded off enemies.

As Farmer Wilding said afterwards in the sanctity of the connubial bed-chamber:

"He was a fine up-standing young chap, with no nonsense about him."

Mrs. Wilding was not other than prepossessed, but she reserved her opinion. The stranger's manner had a bit nonplussed her. He had apparently taken everything, herself included, for granted, and acted accordingly.

Without being in the least rude or self-asserting, he settled down on the instant into her house as his home, and made himself welcome to the good things therein. He had not talked over much at supper, but what he did say was to the point.

Then he had behaved to her as if such a thing as her being other than a well-bred person, and eminently agreeable as a hostess, could not be possible.

He had looked after her comfort in handing her table requisites, and had helped her to the thin home-brewed with an air that spoke of claret or hock being quite as much in his line. He had promptly risen to open the door for herself and Annabel when they had retired for the night, and, indeed—for such little things were properly reckoned by the ex-housekeeper—brought within her doors manners of good society, which half pleased her and half perplexed her.

She said little to her husband. It was her way to think subjects over quietly and take her own bearings before she spoke openly. And things, on the whole, seemed altering a good deal.

Here was Netta going to be married at once, in what seemed to her almost indecent haste, for the girl was urgent in her desire to be married now, without loss of time.

Mrs. Wilding had never scented the love affair with Sir Guy, so that she did not connect Netta's conduct with him in any shape.

And then there was trouble looming at States Martin, for twice during the week she had been summoned to Lady Martin's bedside—once in the dead of night—to see her convulsed with heart spasms, of which the doctors had privately informed her her ladyship must die, and that soon.

If she had ever given Sir Guy a thought as a dangerous acquaintance for her husband's girls her thoughts would most likely have flown to Annabel, for it was of her he had always spoken most admiringly, and it was to her he invariably talked before her face. But this very day he had been married in great state at London to Lady Muriel Mountcastle.

"So far," resumed Mrs. Wilding, "so good!"

She lay long pondering over these things in her mind after the honest farmer was snoring—that unwelcome music of the weary—and one thing she felt tolerably sure of was that young Standing was certainly a superior young man for his class in life, and that he was beyond a doubt very much struck by her husband's daughter Annabel.

"And now that Netta is safely engaged," she considered, as she prodded her unmusical husband so that he should turn over and so snore less heartily, "she can't well step in and upset the apple cart."

It would be well that Annabel should marry early and well, for business matters grew darker with each recurring season, and crops had an ugly way of failing lately, which secretly filled her with alarm.

As for poor Frank Oliviant, she knew he was fond of Annabel, but he was of the sort that would be likely to have his faithful affection unreturned a good many times. Girls nowadays were hard to please with so many new-fangled, fanciful notions, and, somehow, men who were a bit overbearing and took things

for granted generally out in and won while more deserving ones perhaps stood by and waited.

Netta's marriage dated twelve months, and rumours were about "that it was strange Sir Guy Martin and his wife had not returned for his mother's funeral, and that nothing seemed to be known, even at the house, as to when they were coming back.

Things were going on very quietly at Park Farm, and it had become accepted quite as a matter of course that the two young men were at home therein, and that the two were on the most friendly terms. If either of them—or both of them—were in love with Annabel was an open question which no one, not even the most inveterate gossips, could decide.

These vague rumours of how things were with Sir Guy and his lady became louder as time went on, and it was thought still more odd that States Martin should be left in the power and hands of a handful of servants.

The stewards were in despair, and did all they could to silence the many reports that spread about.

"Why should it be strange?" asked one, impatiently, "that young folks should prefer foreign travel even for two years instead of one?"

Still the simple-minded, country-bred people on the large estates were not satisfied that all was well with the head of the house.

It had been so well known that Lady Muriel coveted the mistress-ship of the place. It was odd, more than odd, that she did not hurry back to take up her honours.

"They say," remarked Frank Oliviant to Annabel, when spring was once more deepening into leafy June, "that now Sir Guy and Lady Muriel really are on their way home. It seems to be quite true, Miss Annabel, that they lead a very bad life. Incompatibility of temper, I expect," and he laughed cheerily.

"I cannot bear listening to all the empty talk," said Annabel; "it may be all so untrue. I cannot think for my part why people cannot mind their own business, and let that of other people alone!"

"They can't do it," said innocent Frank Oliviant, hitting upon a grave truth unawares. "There's something in most folks that won't let 'em rest till they can count up their neighbour's chickens—and hatch 'em too."

He spoke irritably, and Annabel glanced up from her plain needlework a trifle anxiously.

"Are you vexed about anything?" she asked, dropping her eyes once more on the shirt-front she was stitching, for in those days farmers' daughters did a great deal of fine stitching.

"I am a bit," he said, honestly. "Oh! Miss Annabel, you could put it all right if you only would."

"Now, Frank, this is the old forbidden subject," said the girl, softly. "Don't hark back upon it; it is so useless."

"Will it be always useless, Annabel?"

His voice was hoarse and thin with pain, and his fingers trembled as he sorted and resorted odd reels and balls of cotton in the neat wicker work basket which was placed for convenience of the worker on a small table by the window.

"Always, always! I cannot say anything else, dear Frank Oliviant, except that, as you know, I am so sorry, for I like you very much indeed."

"But you cannot love me?"

Annabel shook her head sadly, and her busy hands dropped lightly into her lap.

Frank Oliviant was intent on trying whether a certain bodkin he had picked out of the work-basket would, by process of insertion, go into two reels of cotton and connect them effectually, and a speech was upon his tongue that he found difficult to put into words.

Like all good-meaning, nervous men, he started this by venturing a totally irrelevant remark.

"I have been to the Abbey Mill to day.

Netta's baby grows prettier every day. It seems to quite grow me now. Miss Annabel, I could give you quite as good a home as Abbey Mill. Now that my old godmother is dead expense will be no object so far."

"All that makes no difference. You know," laying her hand upon his arm, "that it could not."

The reels of cotton were replaced, and a ball of worsted chosen to fiddle with, and the veins in the restless, fidgety hands stood up like whipcord as the next sentence was jerked out.

"There is somebody else, Miss Annabel!"

A long pause, during which the stitching was resumed with desperate energy.

"I think you might tell me. It is the only thing that can cure me of my craving for you. Miss Annabel, I could never hanker after a woman that I know cared for somebody else."

For answer the girl, thus driven to bay, burst into hurried weeping, which distressed Frank Oliviant, her patient and persistent lover.

"I see!" was all he said, and, rising, he walked unsteadily from the room, leaving her alone in the sunny window.

After drying her eyes she proceeded mechanically to tidy the work-basket, which Frank Oliviant had left at sixes and sevens. It was against her nature to have any of her belongings littered and in confusion.

Now, I fancy a woman's character may be pretty correctly judged by her work-basket. They differ so, do these work-baskets. Some are dainty, satin-lined affairs, that intimate no such thing as toil in connection with needlework.

The tiny, useless-looking scissors, and the heavily-embossed apologetic-looking thimbles, and gilt-headed stilettes and bodkins lie about as if much too fine for anything but the airiest fancy work.

Some are ugly, plain-looking baskets, masses of wools and worsted clog the needles and other implements to a hopeless degree, and dust is thick upon the whole.

There are some work-baskets so absurdly prim in their spic-and-span tidiness that here, too, honest work seems out of the question, and the basket itself seems a calm assertion of standoffishness.

Annabel Wilding's ranked under neither of these heads. It was a neat, useful, but sufficiently pretty wicker arrangement which held easily all that it was required to contain, and seemed always to say, "Here is all you can possibly want, and not difficult to find either."

The scissors were capable-looking implements, and the thimble was plain, of good solid silver, and with holes in it, giving proof of the owner's industry.

Very thoughtful was Annabel as she put all in order within this receptacle, and a quick blush flitted now and again across the clear fairness of her face.

"How could I have been so silly as to cry?" she thought. "What did he think? Poor Frank! And how he would despise me if he knew that I, whom he thinks so proud, have given away my love unsought. Oh, how I wish he had never come!"

Again hot tears fell among the reels and bodkins, and Annabel rose hastily, and went with rapid footsteps to her own room.

As she sat thinking painfully of her unfortunate interview, for unfortunate it was in her eyes, since she had admitted so much by those foolish tears, a quick footstep sounded on the stair, and a rich voice sang a snatch of a merry song, a door on the opposite landing was opened and banged to.

It was Robert Standing, and by the thrill that passed over Annabel Wilding we can arrive at the answer to our question.

Ever since Netta's marriage Annabel's life had been pleasant. The two agreed much better apart, and the introduction of fresh ways into the house by reason of Robert Standing had imperceptibly brought about many small changes which tended to peace,

where hitherto had reigned more or less discontent.

Presently the opposite door was opened again, and Robert Standing apparently stood a moment considering something, for Annabel, listening, did not hear his retreating footsteps. Usually he was quick and decisive in his movements, and bounded up and down stairs two or three steps at a time.

"Miss Annabel," he called, in rather lowered tones, "are you there—in your room?"

Annabel blushed hotly, but did not answer till the handle of her door was imperiously rattled.

"Yes," she said, rather coldly, it must be confessed, "I am here!"

She stood facing him on the landing. What he had been about to say did not escape him at sight of her face.

"You are troubled about something, Miss Annabel? Anything gone wrong in the domestic orbit? Can I do anything?" smiling, as he shyly pointed to Mrs. Wilding's room. "My influence over the good lady is always at your service. Indeed," falling into seriousness, "it is entirely for your sake that I exert it. You know that, do you not?" He hesitated and coloured all over his handsome dark face; he had almost said "dear."

A looker-on at these two would have seen clearly that Annabel's tears for having given her love unsought was quite unnecessary.

"Did you want me?" she asked, nervously.

"Yes, I want you very much indeed," smiling down upon her, "to ride with me to the Abbey Mill, will you? I hate riding about alone after working hours are over, and I'm in a bit of a fix. Look here, I have bought that blessed baby of Mrs. Stubbs's this," holding out from his coat-pocket a coral and bells of the most elaborate description, "and I want you to help me out at the presentation. I am desperately afraid of babies!"

"Yes, I can come if you like!" said Annabel, with a lovely shy blush, and retreating inside her room to get ready.

"Thanks!" in a tone of great relief. "I'll make it all right downstairs. I shall enjoy the ride through the woods so much better than walking over. I've been walking all day, and besides, I have something I want to consult you about."

Annabel heard this, and wondered. And then he ran downstairs in his usual noisy fashion, and she heard him interviewing Mrs. Wilding to the effect that he had been begging Miss Annabel to ride across to the Abbey Mill with him to tide him over the presentation of a coral and bells for the baby.

"And is there anything we can take for you?" he asked, cheerily, "or anything, for that matter, that we can bring back for you? But," laughingly, "I always notice it is generally that things go from here, eh? Mistress Netta knows how to look after herself; and she has learned the art known only, they say, to noble natures, of accepting benefits gracefully."

This was the sort of way in which Robert Standing invariably put Mrs. Wilding into good temper and won his own ends. He, too, knew exceedingly well how to take care of himself.

## CHAPTER V.

As the two rode along through the quiet country lanes, Robert Standing smoking a fragrant weed, and Annabel holding very carefully a small bundle of delicate needlework she had done for this privileged infant, their talk deepened, as it generally did when they were together on other than simply the light topics of the day.

"Is Sir Guy Martin a nice fellow?" asked Robert Standing, rather suddenly, between one subject and another.

Annabel looked up, rather astonished at the direct question, and met a look bent keenly upon her which astonished her still more.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I want to know—just your own opinion," flicking the ash steadily from his



cigar. "One hears such odd things about him and his marriage and his former loves."

"His former loves!" said Annabel, still astonished, but smiling frankly. "I did not know he had any!"

Robert Standing rode on in silence for a few yards.

"Then it is not you whom it is openly said he is afraid to face on coming back here?"

Annabel, instead of riding on in silence, came to a stand-still.

"Indeed, no!" she said. "What is it they say? Please tell me in precise words."

"You will excuse my plain speaking?"

"Certainly I will. I wish you to speak openly since you have said so much."

"For reasons of my own I am glad I have spoken of it. It has been on my mind for a good while, that is, so far as you were concerned."

"Do people," very much startled, "dare to speak of me in connection with him—Sir Guy Martin? It is too absurd for anything."

"Miss Wilding, no names are exactly spoken, but it is said that the reason he does not come back here is that he was so much in love with some farmer's pretty daughter that he cannot face her after his marriage. It is also said that Lady Muriel is furiously jealous of him, and that they have open quarrels, and that he drinks very hard."

"This story does not bear on me in any degree at all, Mr. Standing, or I would tell you so honestly. I cannot account for it even unless—and she came abruptly to a dead stop."

"Yes—unless what?" said Robert Standing. "Do not be afraid to go on. Now that I am assured, and you cannot know how light-hearted it makes me that it is not you, I think I can venture a pretty shrewd guess. Was it Mrs. Netta?"

"That I don't know," answered Annabel, frankly. "Absurd reports spread about these out-of-the-way country places, and some said he was very fond of her. For myself, I do not think so, or else—"

"You think he would have married her? It might have been a case of *noblesse oblige* with him, you see, Miss Wilding. All along I have thought, I freely confess, that it was—that it must have been you, and that in some sort of way you were hurt by his conduct, for that you are in some secret trouble I think it is quite sure. Am I not right, and cannot I in any way help you? I cannot bear to see a woman suffer—least of all a young girl like you!"

"I in trouble! Oh, no! Indeed you are wrong, very—"

"I do not think I am so very far wrong, Mrs. Annabel. You seem to me to have something weighing on your mind. I thought it was this. It only shows what blundering idiots we men are."

A choking sensation prevented the girl from speaking, and the two rode on somewhat fester. Unconsciously Annabel had increased her pace.

"Do you know why I am so glad to have spoken, and so eased my mind, Annabel?"

It was the first time Robert Standing had ever called her by her Christian name, but instead of blushing, as some girls would have done, she looked at him with distinct coldness.

He was not abashed, though he said, "Forgive me," readily enough. He was not the sort to like easy game, and admired her chill dignity. She was a woman worth the winning; and now that her heart was free of what he had thought was burdening it, he meant going in to win.

"It is," he went on, "for a purely selfish reason. Miss Wilding, I want to make running on my own account. Is there any hope for me? I do not wish to startle you, but let me speak freely. From the first moment I saw you I liked you. I know now that I loved you then as I love you now; but the idea took possession of me and held to me that you were in love, unfortunately, with this Sir Guy Martin. Thinking this, and that he had ill-

used you, I hated the sound of his name. Hush!" as she would have spoken. "Let me now speak out fairly all that is in my mind, and then I will tell you what it is that has compelled me to speak of this matter to you, and hear the truth from your lips. I saw Frank Olivant's plight from the first, and, in fact, he very early in our acquaintance took me into his confidence. Here was another reason why I should stifle my own feelings and stand aside. But not an hour ago he came to me and told me that he had asked you for the last time, and that, for a certain reason, he should never, so long as he lived, ask you again."

Annabel now was as red as a June rose. What had poor, outspoken, foolishly fond Frank Olivant told? she wondered.

"If he does carry his heart on his sleeve, he is a downright, simple-hearted good fellow!" said Robert Standing, cordially; "and were it not for pure selfishness, as I say, I could fain plead his cause."

"He has done so for himself," said Annabel, in a strange mixture of heat and coldness, "and failed."

"Pardon me, Miss Wilding, did he think you were in love with Sir Guy?"

"Dear me, no!" says Annabel, hurriedly, frightened out of her calm coldness. "How on earth should he?"

"He seemed certainly to infer to me that it was because he had discovered you were in love with someone else that he will not ask you again. I am at sea!"

"How excessively stupid of him! I told him no such thing."

"He inferred it."

"How can I help," pettishly, for she was at her wits' end, "what he infers?"

"Then he, too, is at fault!"

Poor Annabel! What could she say next? Was ever truthful, honest-hearted girl so pestered?

Was ever woman so utterly nonplussed by the love-making of two desirable wooers?

Before more can be said they are at the gates of Abbey Mill, and Annabel passed swiftly into where Netta sits in a well-furnished room, nursing her chubby infant.

She is prettily attired in a loose strawberry-coloured wrapper trimmed with heavy laces—for Netta in no wise spares her husband's purse-strings—and welcomes her unexpected visitors cordially.

"You have just escaped a heavy shower!" she remarked, in a casual sort of way, handing over the baby to a trim-nursemaid.

The rain, even as she spoke, pattered against the window; and two people, not half a mile distant from the house, likewise felt its sudden onslaught.

They were riding sharply along the broad high road, a man and a woman—no other than Sir Guy Martin and Lady Muriel, his wife.

They had at last come down upon States Martin the night before, without letter or warning to anyone. Lady Muriel had carried her point.

"Upon my word," she was saying to Sir Guy, "you are a charmingly lively companion! If this is coming back home to the acres of one's ancestors, I don't see much in it after all!"

Sir Guy did not deign to answer except by bending his head low over his horse's neck to escape the driving shower of summer rain.

Presently he finds she is turning into a private road on her left.

"Where are you going, Muriel?" he asked, sharply.

"For shelter. My habit is thin, and I don't want to be laid up with lumbago."

She rides determinately onward, and he knows he is powerless to check her wilful course. She is making straight for the Abbey Mill, her father's property, and rented by his tenant, Jabez Stubbs.

What could he say? She had right and reason on her side, as she very well knew. What else she knew he did not care to ask, as he saw the scornful light on the dark, hand-

some face of the woman who, albeit his wife, he feared and hated.

"We have little right to intrude on these people," was what he did say in meek protest.

For all answer she put her horse at a low-sunk fence skirting the ground, and against his will Sir Guy was bound to follow her.

Galloping across a paddock and into the well-kept entrance drive, she pulled up at the front door of the substantial house, and rapped it sharply with her riding whip.

Her behest was quickly answered, and, dismounting, she cried quite pleasantly:

"Ah! Mrs. Stubbs, I believe. Will you forgive me for rushing to you for shelter. I am wet through, and cry your pity. Miss Wilding, I believe, bowing carelessly to Annabel, and glancing at Robert Standing inquiringly. "I think you know me," to Netta. "I am Lady Martin!"

Netta had known her quite well, and her gaze went past the tall, masculine figure to Sir Guy, still on his horse at the doorway.

"Mr. Standing," he said, quietly, "Lady Muriel Martin," by way of introduction, and Lady Muriel wondered where such girls got their manners from. As for Robert Standing, noting his bearing, she laughed upon him cordially.

"I wish," she said, "you would help my husband from taking cold by lifting him bodily out of the saddle if he proves restive. A man with influenza is too unbearable for anything, and that will be the upshot if he persists in getting wet."

There was a wicked, malicious gleam in her fine black eyes as Robert went to invite Sir Guy to enter.

"You seem very comfortable in this roomy old house," she said next, to Netta. "How pretty you have made this room! Now, I can order the fitting-up of stables and saddle-rooms, but for the life of me I know nothing about the arranging of house furniture—anti-macassars, and all the rest of it."

Sir Guy was in the room by this time, muttering something about unwarrantable intrusion, but Netta and Annabel shook hands with him, and politely disclaimed any such apology.

The baby, looking contented and radiant, was in its mother's arms again, the maid having hastily restored it to answer the door to Lady Muriel.

Netta, rather ostentatiously, Annabel thought, kept it, instead of giving it back to the maid, and Lady Muriel laughed curiously. "You are proud of your baby, Mrs. Stubbs?"

"Very!" said Netta, quietly.

"Pray let Sir Guy look at it. He is so fond of children. I assure you, my dear little woman," with the insulting condescension of a great lady, "he considers it sufficient punishment for all his sins that he is doomed to be a childless husband."

Annabel blushed, and wondered why Netta's eyes should shine with such an exultant light. Her face was flushed with rosy light, and motherhood had as yet but added to her charms.

She was looking lovely, and Sir Guy looked just about as uncomfortable under his ordeal as it was possible for a man to be.

Wine was brought in, as was the custom in those days, and while the three women kept up a running fire of small talk Sir Guy and Robert Standing chatted "horses" to the mutual content of each. As a matter of fact, the two rather pitied Sir Guy, who, he could plainly see, had somewhat too much of a bargain in Lady Muriel.

The rain ceasing, the horses were brought round; and Lady Muriel, instead of allowing Sir Guy to mount her, summoned young Standing to her aid.

"You are fond of horses, Mr. Standing?" she said, in her loud, contemptuous tones. "You must come to States Martin, and see our stud and my Russian ponies; queer little devils they are!"

Back through the evening lanes again went Robert Standing and Annabel, and naturally

their former talk was resumed after they had discussed the strangeness of their having thus met Sir Guy and Lady Muriel.

"I want you to decide something for me," said Robert, quite abruptly. "You know the good offer I have got to go to France on this new railway. I had another urgent letter this morning, and I want to decide it at once. Am I to go or not?"

"Will it be for your good?" asked Annabel, evasively. Not yet was she accustomed to the idea of his submitting his affairs to her guidance, although she had admitted that perhaps there might be that chance he had asked for. More she would not say.

"Certainly," he answered, "for my advancement in the profession. It is a splendid offer, and one only given me through high influence."

"Then why not take it?" but to his supreme delight he saw that her lips trembled.

"Annabel," he said, bending down very low over her and laughing into her eyes, "you have not been quite frank with me, except in so far as Sir Guy is concerned. I begin to see through a glass darkly. It is somebody else you have been in love with all this time. Is it with me, darling?"

A ripple of happy laughter escaped from Annabel, which was the only answer she vouchsafed to her commanding lover, but it satisfied him well enough.

Half an hour later, supper being over, Robert Standing and Frank Olivant smoked their last pipes for the day in the upper garden.

"There is no ill-feeling. Surely not, Standing, that you have won what I have lost. Don't you think it for a moment," said Frank Olivant.

"All right, old man; but I wanted to tell you the first—she wished it too—it is but fair. I hope we shall always be friends—real good friends. You will act a brother's part to her while I am gone? Am I asking too much?" as no reply came.

"I can't promise that much just yet," said poor Frank, quite humbly. "I'm off myself for a week or two, and when I come back, if I do come back, I will tell you straight. Whichever way it is you will know that I am doing all I can for the best."

"Yes, old fellow; but cheer up, and we shall see you happy yet."

"I ought to have seen all along how it was," said he, ruefully, "but somehow, I didn't. I just went blundering on."

"I say, Frank," said the other, "did you think, as I did, that she was in love with Sir Guy Martin—had been before his marriage, I mean?"

"Lord, no!" came the surprised and prompt answer. And Frank laughed aloud.

"All the same, I have my reasons for thinking the old lady did," nodding his head in the direction of the house.

"Ah! she never spotted that little game," said Frank, laughing a little still. "Netta was too deep for her!"

"It was Netta Wilding, then?"

"Of course it was. He treated her rascally bad, too, I'll say that much, and she showed more spirit than I thought she had when she turned about and married Stubbs. I like Netta well enough; she was always very nice to me, you see!"

"And you were in her confidence, then?"

"So far, as she told me right out, one night, why she was in such a dence of a hurry to push on her marriage," he owned, rather sheepishly. "I helped her, you see, by egging Stubbs on a bit, for he was a bit inclined to be slow, between you and me. As it was, she was married a fortnight after Sir Guy, and I saw that the announcement was put in all the papers, so he was bound to see it."

"Ah! it just about served him right. He isn't having a particularly good time, I should say, just now. Lady Muriel is a handful of devilry I shouldn't like to tackle myself."

"She was always a rum 'un!" admitted Frank, who ought to know something about it, as his family had rented under the Mount-castles for generations.

When Robert Standing went in he found, somewhat to his chagrin, that Annabel had escaped to bed on the all-round plea of a headache.

He followed the farmer upstairs, and shut his door, which was opposite hers, with a bang, but, in the reverberation, craftily opened it again to see Annabel do the same with hers to kiss her father good-night.

His eyes sparkled with mischief at the success of his ruse. She would not meet his eye, but yielded him a shy good-night. And how beautifully she blushed!

Mrs. Wilding was already in her room, and she fell to wondering why on earth her spouse did not follow her.

Then she opened her door to listen, and she heard he was in young Standing's room, and that the two were talking eagerly about something.

When he joined her he was looking grave—very grave, indeed.

"Well, mother!" seating himself on a wide chair instead of undressing himself in his usual hurried, scrambling fashion. "Here's a pretty how-to-do! Young Standing is off to France like a shot out of a shovel, and he wants to marry our Annabel!"

"Of course he does!" was his wife's answer, as she screwed up her side curls in whitey-brown paper. "That's no news to me!"

"No news to you! Bless if 'tisn't to me, then!"

Another twist of hair was then carefully tweaked up and placed within another scrap of paper, preparatory to the twisting process.

"Anybody could see with half an eye that he's had that in his head all along."

"Well," ruefully, it must be owned, "I always thought Frank Olivant would have come to me some day for Annabel; but as to young Standing, I'm jiggered if I saw anything."

"Men like you never do."

The honest man wiped the perspiration from his face, but did not dispute his better half's words. He supposed she was right enough, as he found her to be, in the main.

"Now, I wonder," slowly undressing, "how long he has cared for the girl?"

"Who? Robert Standing?" asked his wife, putting on her net nightcap so that she looked exactly like a wise old owl. "Oh, I can tell you that!"

"The dickens you can!" The farmer was fairly agast. This banged Bannagher, to cull one of his own pet expressions.

"Well!"

"Well; I should say from the time he shook hands with her the night he first came, while you and his father were bustling about, supper being waiting, and forgetting to notice anything that was going on else. I never saw a man struck all of a heap in my life as he was. As for Annabel—"

"Ay! how about the girl?" asked the anxious father.

"That remains to be proved," said the sagacious little woman, looking now still more like an owl, for she had thriftily put out one candle, since her own toilet was finished, leaving her lord to manage as best he could. "Has he spoken to her?"

"Spoken to her! Yes, don't I tell you!" came testily from the good man's lips.

"No, that's just what you didn't tell me, Wilding, and how was I to know?"

"You somehow seems to scent out most things," he grunted. "Of course he's spoke to her to-night!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Wilding, thinking that, after all, she had for once in her life not scented out everything that was going on under her nose. But this admission she wisely kept to herself.

Evidently the farmer was not elated by this

news. He and the Olivants were friends of old and close standing.

In his heart he had always hoped one of his children would marry into the family. He was disappointed.

"He've let the grass grow under his feet, have that Frank," he grunted. "I'm always telling him he ain't half sharp enough!"

"He been sharp enough and plenty," said Mrs. Wilding, blowing out the remaining candle.

"How d'ye mean?" asked the poor bothered man. "You don't mean but for to own as he's let Standing get the start of him and walk clean over the ground, as he'll always do through everything?" grumbling himself into the wide four-poster.

"Well, he couldn't do more than keep on asking her, I suppose?" snapped Mrs. Wilding, "and if the girl said no, she said no? I suppose women, at any rate before marriage, can have their pick and choice of things?"

"Yes, if they gets a pick and choice," admitted he, testily, "but sometimes they takes what they can get, and generally comes the best off, to my thinking."

This was a home thrust which Mrs. Wilding resented in her heart, but all she said was "that one didn't as a rule tell all one's chances—that for her part she always thought the least said was the soonest ended."

"When did he ask her?" asked the farmer, for his curiosity was sharply aroused, and all idea of sleep driven away from his eyes.

"Frank Olivant! Oh! about every three weeks, so far as I can judge."

Silence reigned, save for an oppressive masculine sigh now and again.

"Then you think as how she's been in love with young Standing all along?"

Mrs. Wilding was silent for a moment.

"I didn't say any such thing, Wilding," she made answer. "What I said was that it remained to be proved."

## CHAPTER VI.

It had been for some time understood that Mr. Robert Standing might leave the neighbourhood at any time, and go abroad—to France! The simple country people held him in a kind of reverence that such bold undertaking was contemplated.

A railway in France—away farrin' France to them was some distant land across seas; a frog-eating country, where the people spoke all the tongues of Babel.

But when it leaked out that Miss Annabel Wilding was engaged to this bold pioneer, the inhabitants of her village drew in their breaths aghast.

What! One of them, a fair, slim, slip of a girl, marry a man who would perhaps force her to live in strange countries and among farmers! What could Farmer Wilding be thinking of? He may well go about with such a thoughtful face.

As in fact he did, for he felt it very hard upon him that Frank Olivant should go away as he said for "a break"; but the farmer, now that his eyes were opened, knew what that meant. It was harder still that at Southampton market old Olivant should be gruff and cold to him; and that Mrs. Olivant should hope, in that freezing tone of hers, "that Miss Wilding would never repent the step she was taking, but that, of course, everybody knew their own business best."

Just after Christmas the sudden call for him to go came like a thunderbolt. Talk about soldiers having to start at a moment's notice! Why, young Standing was hustled off in a heathenish manner with only three days' grace! Why, it was only time to well talk the thing over. And coming back in exactly three months' time to fetch his bride! Merciful powers! What next?

The consternation settled down gradually after the bold young man was gone, and Park Farm settled down into its accustomed calm—so still and silent it seemed without the two young men.



Lady Muriel, coming in promiscuously, chaffed Annabel roundly about losing both her swains at once, and seemed quite amoyed on her own account that the engineer had departed without even coming up to States Martin to bid her adieu, for in a way she had made a great deal of Robert Standing.

Things were not going well at States Martin. It was more than whispered that my lady was "gay," and that Sir Guy drank very hard, and that they quarrelled incessantly.

And at Abbey Mill?

Mr. Jabez Stubbs, although a quiet, rather sullen man, knew how to take care of his own. Once for all he told his wife, of whom he was still fond and indulgent, that he would stand no nonsense with the master of States Martin.

He let her know that he was well aware of those old love passages, and that he did not intend his honour to be trifled with; and Netta, somewhat to his surprise, was very patient and good, for she also knew how to value the good things that had come to her share.

She was, to be sure, still more extravagant in dress. She made a point of the drawing-room at Abbey Mill being freshly furnished in the latest and most approved style. She obtained the desire of her heart, a low phaeton and pair of ponies, instead of the old-fashioned four-wheeler and roan mare which had been good enough for his mother.

Still Jabez thought wisely, "I can afford it all, and it will please and content her." Evidently, "laughing in his beard," the little woman wants to let him see she ain't fretting, and that she's got all she wants." Jabez was flattered in his secret soul, and did not even kick over the traces when Netta took to re-organising his own wardrobe into something more fashionable—more befitting the well-to-do country gentleman, which it was her pleasure he should be. And the Stubbs were all rich. It was a nasty name to be sure, but Netta did not see how she could alter that.

As for the baby, it was a marvel of beauty and painstaking care. Sir Guy could never leave his gates without meeting the dainty caravan of perambulator and small, neatly-harnessed donkey, with its little padded saddle and ribbon-decorated whip. This whimsically accoutred beast was a parting present from Robert Standing.

Lady Muriel laughed aloud at the show that ridiculous little woman made of her brat.

"Just to spite you, eh, Guy?" she would say, openly. "See what you have missed! Fancy if that curly-headed little rascal were heir to States Martin!"

She seemed to take infinite pleasure in calling often at Abbey Mill, and making much of Netta and Jabez Stubbs. She would never buy or exchange a horse but Mr. Stubbs must come and give her his advice.

And once, in a mad freak, she hoisted the baby before her on her side-saddle, and rode in amongst her houseful of guests at States Martin, introducing it as the future heir.

"Ah!" laughing loudly at her indecent joke, "you did not know we possessed a nursery at States Martin! Ha! ha! ha! we kept it so quiet, you see. Is he not a miracle of beauty, good people? Gay, my pet, why are you so sombre?" to her furious husband.

"I say," said a man whose name was much linked with hers, "you will go too far some day. He's got the devil's own work to keep down his temper. Don't be a fool. Let well enough alone."

But Lady Muriel only laughed the louder. Little recked she of coming ill so long as she pleased her own mad fancies.

There came a day when, perhaps, Sir Guy had been drinking harder than usual, for he came to Abbey Mill in the cool of the evening, and finding Netta alone in the old rose garden he forgot Lady Muriel, he forgot Jabez Stubbs, he forgot honour and common decency.

All he remembered was that she was his little love, the girl who had spurned him in Athorley Woods, and so won his respect, and fastened her memory on his heart by that very

fact, so that do what he would he could never forget her.

"Are you satisfied, Netta Wilding?" he asked, "that your evil wishes are working? You see how it is with me."

Netta walked on quietly. She was not, perhaps, a very high-minded little woman. She was not loving and impulsive, and her affection, even in the old days, for this man at her side had been but born of her insatiate vanity. It was her nature to care for those that gave good to her; to those that ministered to her desires.

And her desires were legion, but in the main sensible enough.

She wore a piquant gown of blue Liberty stuff of strange devices. There were upon it numberless queer-shaped creatures, with weird eyes, which seemed to stare at and mock Sir Guy.

In his fuddled state of brain he hated the gown, but the woman within it he loved and craved for with a mad, sick craving that he had ceased combating with.

Her very carelessness, as she laughed lightly, and stooped now and again to pick some lowly flower, exasperated him to madness.

"Netta," he cried, sober enough now, "we love each other still. Let us leave everything, and be together always. Let us go to sunny Italy; let us leave that fiend in human shape that came between us to work out her own ill. By Jove! she'll do it quickly, and then so sure as I am a living man I will marry you, and you shall come back in triumph as the mistress of States Martin!"

"Is divorce, then, so easy?" asked she, smiling up in his face with apparent innocence. "Are you sure?"

"As sure as that there is a Heaven above us."

Netta trembled, but not with love. She had waited for something like this. He was at her feet once again. She was mistress of the situation.

For a moment she could not speak for a wicked, triumphant joy, as she heard the quick panting breath of the man she delighted to humiliate.

In her hand she carried a small hunting-crop of her husband's, with which, as chance had it, she had recently chastised a dog for some misbehaviour.

She caressed the thong with her dainty, nervous fingers, and smiled again as she sauntered along a shady path, her cool blue gown trailing behind on the soft turf.

In the midst of a flow of hot, passionate words she stopped, facing him.

"And you want my answer at once?" she asked.

He only thought the hard set of her lovely face was due to agitation. Men are but men.

"You are right," she said slowly. "I do not love my husband, not as you mean. I do not love anybody, but I care for my name and my position. My answer to you is—"

And upward through the air came a swishing sound of thoughted leather, which caught Sir Guy's face right across the centre with dreadful force, so that the blood gushed forth, and he yelled with agony.

Jabez Stubbs, hearing the cry rushed forward, and Netta saw by his face that he had heard all. She had not noticed the high hedge of laurels. She smiled, saying with quivering breath:

"That is my final answer to the biggest coward God ever made. Leave him alone," to her husband, "he will make for his own kennel."

She turned and left them, and whether Jabez helped the man who had plotted his dishonour off his ground she never inquired.

Sir Guy will carry the marks of that answer to his dying day.

Stitching was the order of the days at Park Farm, and Annabel, in her loneliness, often wondered a little wearily how it would all get done in time.

Letters came to her with businesslike regularity from the distant land to which her lover had gone, and these were her only love

fare, and very good fare she found them, for Robert Standing wrote always in good spirits. Apparently she would like the new, strange life out there. And from his vivid descriptions of the scenery, and the manners of the people, she grew to look forward to the complete change with a secret pleasure that was cheering enough in the depressing atmosphere of home disapprobation.

Mrs. Wilding was the only one who saw good in it, for she was of a much wider mind than most in this respect of place. When living at States Martin she had known of people going to and fro to France and Italy much as if it were only running up to London.

"It can't be such an awful journey, my dear," she would say, consolingly, after some amazing speech of a wondering neighbour, "and I am sure it's a fine country, and I don't know how you will speak their gibberish—for gibberish it is by what I've heard of it at States Martin. It seems so fast that I could never catch a word, and all the maids, as called themselves French, was just as stuck-up as you please. But they soon picked up English, I'll say that for them; but then we don't jabber at such a rate. That's where you'll find the difficulty. And as to the food they eat, it's just awful kickshaws, and they squeeze all the gravy out of meat before they roast it—for pottage, as they call it, but of course you can cook your own food as you like it."

Mrs. Wilding rather enjoyed these exhaustive talks, wherein she could air her worldly knowledge, and she was pleased to say quietly to the homely callers, "that, of course, Annabel had learned French at boarding-school. They must not forget that, and that her husband had an interpreter."

She was very particular and fussy about the house linen for the far-away home. She bought carefully of the best, and pulled her poor fingers sore in drawing threads, so that all the hems should be even.

"And mind," she cautioned, "you have your washing done at home, unless you want all this to be torn to shreds by beating upon stones by the river—for I've heard that much about the washing over there!"

The weeks passed on till the last one in April came, and any day Robert Standing might be expected.

Things under Mrs. Wilding's sway were in as complete a state of readiness as was possible under the circumstances; and when just about to sit down and fold her busy hands in comparative peace she was hastily summoned to States Martin.

There she found everything in wild and utter confusion. Sir Guy was raving in *delirium tremens*, his face cut and gashed fearfully—some said by one of the grooms at the hotel in Southampton, others said by a woman of low repute in that town.

And Lady Muriel was missing.

The house was full of her disordered guests, who one and all seemed to look to Mrs. Wilding to set things in some sort of order, because she had for so many years been housekeeper under the old and more respectable régime.

Poor woman! she was at her wits' end, and even Lady Muriel's own people would not countenance their daughter's sin and shame by coming to her help in the emergency.

As for the present housekeeper, she had been a tool of my lady's, and had evidently decamped with her.

For days Sir Guy lay between life and death, worse than a lunatic in his ravings, and Mrs. Wilding did her best, but could but hope he had not long to live.

But nature was strong within him, and presently he was able to issue stern orders that everything in and about the place should be straightened—that everything belonging to his shameless wife should be turned out or destroyed—that preparations for his own departure should be set on foot with the least delay possible.

(Concluded on page 256.)

# THE EYES OF THE PICTURE

By the Author of "For Silk Attire," etc., etc.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Violet Herbert never forgot the waking of the next morning. She could not understand it. To wake with a springing hope, with an intense relief—not to dread the daylight, the faces to be seen, the words to be heard; to seek for the shadows, to look all round for them, and see only light—to wonder if it were possible they would not roll back again and cover her from the sunshine—what did it all mean?

She lay in a sort of dreamy languor, looking at all the pretty familiar objects in her room—not feeling Violet Herbert, but someone else. She wondered if this were happiness, and if it were, whether she ought not to think more of that miserable soul that had gone out than of her own release? She might if she were very good, she thought; but she had not energy enough to decide. She could only give herself up to that curious feeling of peace that wrapped her all round as a mother's arms her child.

When she went down one of the first things she did was to write to her lawyer, in the midst of which Erlscourt came in—wanted to know what she was writing; and when she told him, hesitatingly, that it was to ask her lawyer to act for her in all concerning the dead man he swept up the letter—he would see to that.

She flushed scarlet.

"Leigh, you have done enough," she said.

"I don't think so. I will take care your wishes are obeyed, and I promise you I will only act by deputy—probably through my lawyer. But I will not have you seem to have the slightest concern with it." He had spoken sternly, now he added more softly:

"Have I no rights in this, Violet? Is it not my place to guard your name?"

Violet acknowledged in her heart that he had the right to say that no man should be able to say Erlscourt's wife had had part or lot with Gilbert Venner. Erlscourt, in his chivalrous respect for her, would not use that plea just now in so many words, but he meant it, and Violet gave way.

So Erlscourt's own lawyer had his instructions. His client said carelessly he had known Venner well, and he did not want the parish to bury him.

The lawyer, not surprised at any such action in Erlscourt, suggested that the dead man's effects would pay expenses.

"I don't suppose he has left any," was the answer; "and if he had, let the police or the parish, or whoever it is, have them."

But, of course, it was Violet who paid for everything—about that there had been no dispute.

"Are you going to the inquest, Mr. Challoner?" asked Greville, the day after Venner's death. "It takes place to-morrow. I am going."

"Yes," said Challoner, "I am going."

And on the way to the inquest he confided to Greville that he was a little fidgety about it—not sure that Leigh might not have been mixed up with the raid.

"He wasn't there," said Greville, who by this time had heard a good deal from Leigh himself, though not the actual truth.

"Perhaps not. I hope it will be a lesson to you young men," said the lawyer, severely, "not to frequent such disreputable places—they are nothing less."

Greville had to bear the blame, both of himself and Leigh. He would have given up the club as soon as he was engaged to Dora had he not helped his friend. And as for Leigh, Greville knew his purpose to some extent.

Poor Emily sat at home in an agony, though she was not very clear as to how Leigh could be implicated, or, if implicated, how punished.

As a matter of fact, he was not implicated at all. Hilliard said Venner was hit in the scuffle—by whom could not be decided. He held his tongue about anything else. The two other constables said the same, adding that they thought Venner was drunk.

Hilliard, recalled, merely said he had not observed that, his tone implying that it might have been so—which was, of course, not a contradiction.

So the jury considered the deceased had been drinking; and the medical evidence attributing death to the injuries received in that scuffle, they came to the conclusion that deceased died from the effects of a blow, and acquitted the police of all blame.

Then the coroner gave the order for burial, and a grey-haired gentleman arose in court, giving his name, and announcing himself as a solicitor, and stated that, with the coroner's permission, he would charge himself with the arrangements for the funeral of the deceased. A few questions elicited nothing more than that he was acting under instructions.

Challoner, turning hot and cold, whispered to Greville,—

"What the deuce does it all mean? That fellow is Leigh's lawyer."

"Well, but," said Greville, imperturbably, "Leigh isn't his only client, is he?"

"Nonsense! There are other things," answered Challoner, with a vagueness not to be expected in one of His Majesty's counsel. "I can't make it out."

The coroner made no objection, and that very afternoon Edgar Marsden was buried in a quiet spot in a North London cemetery. No one was present besides the chaplain and sexton, save Erlscourt's solicitor.

The day had turned lowering, and a drizzly rain fell drearily all the afternoon; not a flower lay on the coffin, not a throb of pain in any heart, not a tear in the eyes that gazed mechanically on the name of the dead laid in his last resting place.

It might have been different. There might have been a long regret in many hearts, there might have been tears falling from wistful eyes; but he had not deserved more than this—decent respect, and a grave that might have been forgotten if deep wounds did not at times ache with the old pain.

Erlscourt, waiting at the solicitor's office that dreary afternoon till the latter returned, heard that all had been done as wished.

Greville was with him—Greville who, in that studio where so many happy hours had been passed and careless talk rippled on, had heard why his help had been wanted, and been thanked as he liked best. Greville knew what the grave, downcast face and the long sigh meant with which his friend listened to the lawyer.

"Thanks," said Erlscourt, in a low voice; then added, half to himself, "That page is closed."

Out again in the gloomy streets—there is not very much that is as gloomy as a wet summer afternoon.

Greville, always sympathetic, walked on, waiting, as it were, for the other to give the lead.

Erlscourt seemed thinking; but suddenly he drew his hand from Greville's arm, where it had rested.

"I am going to my sister's," he said.

"I thought you were going to Vane Street?"

"I know you did. No, I can't—not to-day. I am afraid of myself, and could not bear to wound her. Will you go for me Grev? You have done so much for me already—"

"Hush, Leigh! Could I do too much?"

"That is what you all say. I don't know what I have done to deserve all this love. Well,

tell her just what you heard Duncan say. She will know why I do not come."

They parted. Erlscourt had not very much idea how he should tell his story—none at all how Emily would take it. He had to tell it for Violet's sake, and for justice sake towards those who loved him, and whose love he had tried hardly.

He found them sitting in the study—Emily and her husband—for it was now vacation time, and Challoner was at home.

Both started up with such glad greeting that Erlscourt was deeply touched.

"I haven't deserved such a welcome," he said. "I have given you reason enough to doubt me; but, thank Heaven, I can clear that up now!"

"You've some love left for us," said Emily, still holding him, and looking up smiling into his face—half a jest, and half another meaning in the words. But to-day Erlscourt was not in the mood to resent the reproach—so softened, seeing all love through the medium of the one supreme love.

"I never lost it," he said. "You know that, Mentor!"

The gentle answer made Emily half-ashamed. She told him to sit down, and resumed her own chair.

"You're not in any difficulty about this job, are you?" said Challoner, with kindly anxiety.

"Not as you mean," was the grave answer. "I had nothing to do with the raid. I had left before the police got in."

"You were there, then?" exclaimed Challoner. "I was half afraid of it, and went to the inquest on Venner to see if anything was said about you."

"It was very good of you," said the young man, gratefully. "No; I had nothing to do with that. What I came to explain was why I went to the club at all. You were afraid for me—naturally. What I went for was not the play—though I did play—but to get out of the very Gilbert Venner a secret he held, and I meant to know."

"What do you mean, Leigh?" said Emily, in utter surprise; and Challoner said:

"What could Venner's secrets have to do with you? Isn't he the man that was at the Danby's one night?"

"Yes, the same man. Well," said Erlscourt, with excessive quietness, "Gilbert Venner's real name was Edgar Marsden, and he was the husband of Violet Herbert."

"What!" from Emily; but Challoner was silent, looking at the face opposite him.

That one ejaculation was the only sound tint was heard in the room for some seconds.

"That surprises you!" said Erlscourt, at last, looking up, and with irrepressible bitterness in his tone. "You see, for once in a way, intuition was right."

"But she was living apart from him," said Emily.

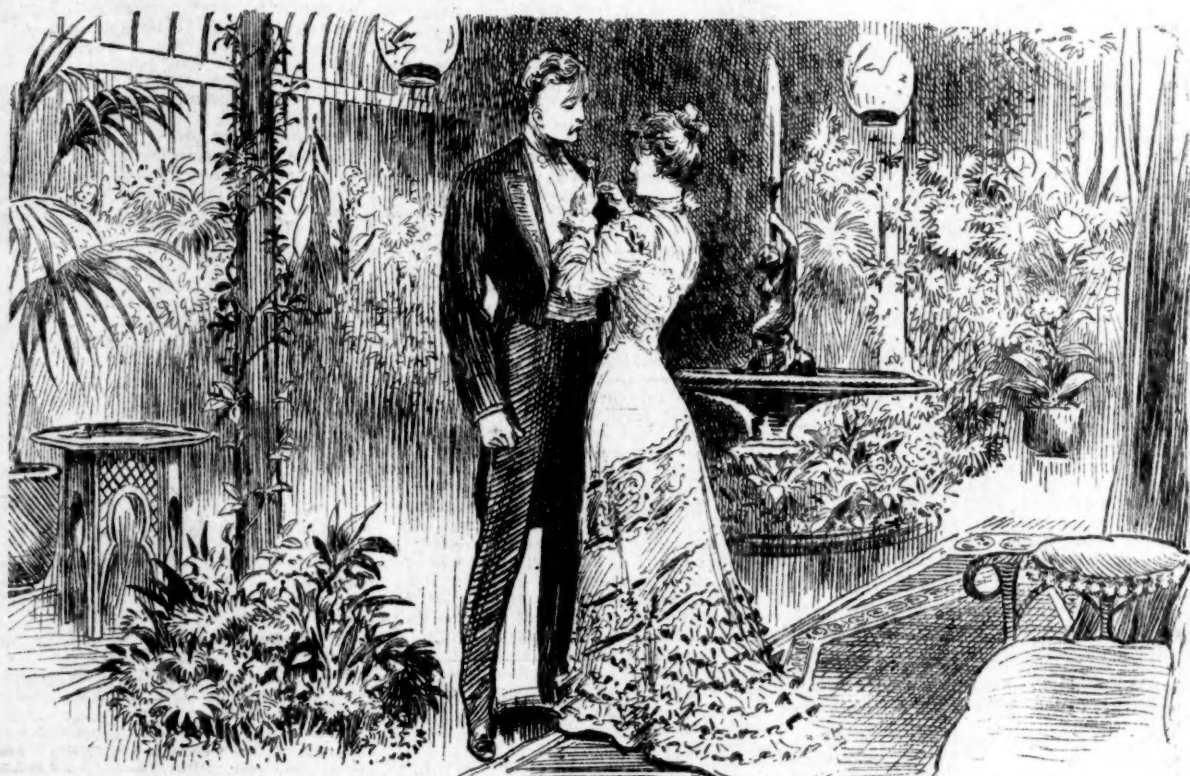
"Is that, then, a sign-manual of evil? Is it always the woman's fault? How cruel you good women are sometimes! I suppose if I tell you she had a wretched childhood, that at sixteen she met this Marsden, believed him, trusted him, loved him, because she had never known any love at all; that he married her, that he denied her a year after, told her she was no wife—never had been; that she never saw him from that day till she saw him dead in the hospital—I suppose then you will say she was the sinner, not the sinned against. That, somehow, the wrong was hers? I wonder, in Heaven's name, why you women, who have never known an evil thought even, are so merciless!"

"Leigh! hush!" said Challoner, but gently. He sympathised with the indignant outburst.

"How was it Mrs. Herbert was in any doubt about her marriage? There are always proofs."

"There was not in this case, save what he had." He described the marriage in the Webb village, and how it was that Violet was ignorant of even the place. "She told me everything one day," he went on; "at least, I made her. She would have sent me away, refused to see or speak to me again. It is my doing—"





"I THINK OF THE OLD TIMES VERY OFTEN, LEIGH, HAPPY AS I AM," SAID VIOLET.

not hers, that we are not now as strangers. If I say so much of what should be between ourselves, it is to show you, Emmie, that Violet is not a scheming adventuress, but the purest-souled woman I ever knew!"

And still Emily sat silent, longing, perhaps, to have nothing between her boy and herself, her prejudice melting before his impassioned vindication, but yet too proud to yield at once.

Possibly if Leigh had taken a different course he might have conquered her sooner, but the smouldering anger of weeks had caught fire and must blaze out.

"How did you know," asked Challoner, "that Venner and Marsden were the same? And how did you get these proofs?"

Erlscourt told in outline how he had discovered Venner to be Marsden, and also how he had obtained the proofs. Brief and bald as he purposely made the recital, it was enough to cause the lawyer to shake his head, half disapproving violence, half admiring the indomitable spirit, and Emily to cry out,—

"Oh! Leigh, you might have killed him!" "I should have killed him," said Erlscourt, with his dark eyes aglow, "but for Violet. Well, the man is dead now—he cannot hurt her more—let him be. I want to shut out his very memory if I can. I would never have spoken his name again if it had not been that you must know—you two—why I seemed to be drifting away. You think I went too far, Arthur? I have broken the law; I have run a risk. Well, but you have not stood by and seen the woman you would die for breaking her heart under a shame that to her was real—that might have been real. If you had, you would cast custom and law to the winds, as I did, and welcome the risk. You would do it now, for all the years that lie between us."

"Well, I don't know," said Challoner, with a curious little smile. "I know that I'm very proud of you."

And Emily said under her breath, "Poor thing!" thinking of the woman lonely through long years—lonely and shamed, and her girlish love shattered. How could she help loving this clear-eyed, loyal-hearted man, who threw around her the strength of a passion that was emptied of self? Even to Emily's soul, narrowed to a set rote and rule of propriety, there seemed no sin in such a love. And yet, was this quite the wife for her brother? Sin there was not, but there had been the seeming of it.

Erlscourt rose. "I have had may say," he said. "You know now that I am no worse than I was. As for a card, I shall never touch one again. I am soul-sickened with them."

"Thank you for coming at once to tell us," said Challoner, with his hand on his brother's shoulder. "I need not ask what you are going to do about this most deeply-wronged lady. What would you like us to do?"

"Ah!" said the other quickly, "I have no doubt of you," and his eyes went to his sister, standing apart. "Heaven bless you, Arthur; you were always a brother to me. My poor darling! I cannot worry her now with any wishes of mine!"

He went to his sister. "Good-bye, Emmie," he said, stooping for her kiss, "I am going."

She held his hands tightly. "Not yet," she said. "Stay an instant. Violet loves you very much!"

It flashed across him how impossible it was for this medium nature to gauge the love Violet could feel.

"One cannot measure love," he said. "I can only answer she would have borne all she could bear sooner than have me do as I have done."

"And you loved her enough to disobey—well enough to do all you could to prove her another man's wife!"

"It was love," said Erlscourt,

wincing under this questioning. "I ask nothing from you, Emmie. I would not force you to welcome her."

"Hush! Don't be so proud!" said Emily, half-crying and half-laughing. "I have been wrong, dear, and I have made you suffer. Forgive it. I will be hard and merciless no longer. I will love her because you do. I can't have a cloud between us. I am going to see her to-morrow."

"That's right," said her husband, with a suspicious unsteadiness of voice. But Erlscourt kissed his sister. "Dear old Mentor!" He could not say anything else.

"Poor boy!" said Challoner, when husband and wife were alone again. "It's curious story. Who shall say there are no romances in real life? And what could knight have done more for his lady than he has done for her? You have done quite right, my dear"—to Emily, who cried quite tears of relief. "I think I'll come with you and see this pretty flower that our boy wears in his heart."

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

Glad though he was, perhaps Erlscourt was a little nervous as to that meeting between his sister and Violet—Violet herself was certainly very nervous. But both misjudged Emily—from different degrees of ignorance. She was thoroughly warm-hearted, though that amiable quality was sometimes obscured by her prejudices; and in this case her heart took charge—no doubt, partly because she was a good deal ashamed of her conduct in the whole matter, and was eager to atone for it. So that when Violet came into her drawing-room, where the two Challoners and Erlscourt waited, she was not left long in doubt as to the sort of reception she would be awarded.

She had hardly made a step from the door before she felt two motherly arms about her, and for the first time in many a long year the fair, tired young head rested on a friendly woman's heart.

Challoner was not behindhand in the earnestness of his greeting. He did not wonder, as he held the slim white hands, and that subtle charm of hers grew on him, at the "infatuation" Emily had grieved over. He acknowledged as true what his brother had said to him yesterday, "You would do it now—for all the years that lie between us." No service would seem too daring made for this sweet, stately woman.

She must come and stay with them, Emily said, with a touch—how rare in her!—of Leigh's impetuosity. They were quiet people, and Dora was still with them, and would be a charming companion.

All this speech gave Violet time to recover herself, for her first impulse had been to refuse the offer. She was for the time shattered by all she had gone through, and solitude, perfect quiet, looked enticing. To stay in a house with almost strangers—and one a prim person not prone to throw aside formalities—implied effort, a certain amount of conventionalism.

A minute's thought corrected what would have been a mistake; and, scarcely looking at Erlscourt to see if he approved—did she not know he would?—she accepted the invitation.

Erlscourt lingered when the others had gone—held her in his arms, and wanted to tell her—tried to tell her, how glad he was, but he faltered at every word, and gave it up.

Gone doubt and temptation and the dread looking into empty years—honour and love taking their place. How was the full heart to speak, save in silent fashion?

Dora was wild with delight when Violet came, even though the young lady was busy in preparations for her approaching wedding, which was to take place at her father's house in the country.

Violet must come, too, she decreed, before the second day was over. This was announced first to Greville, who acquiesced meekly, as became his position; and a hearty invitation from the Gloucestershire squire conquered Violet's scruples.

In the meanwhile she rallied in the peaceful routine of the Hamilton Terrace house. Erlscourt's frequent visits and Dora's liveliness saved it from the monotony that would have fretted her.

She was thankful beyond words for the restful feeling that took possession of her, for lying down at night without gladness that one more day was over; rising in the morning without dread of the coming hours; very quiet and subdued, welcoming Erlscourt with the soft smile that was to him worth a kingdom. No one but he gave her credit for being so utterly content as she was.

"I do all I can for her," said Emily; "perhaps we are too quiet."

"Let her alone," said Erlscourt; "it is the best thing. She cannot understand peace—that is all."

So she was left alone. Challoner, of course, was, meanwhile, her devoted servant very soon, and though it was not in Emily to maintain extremes, Violet got on with her a great deal better than Leigh did.

She might be as sensitive as he, but she was a woman, and less vulnerable against another woman. She had feminine fineness, and, besides, she had no old associations of authority and kindness to tie her down, as he had.

Little by little she lost her air of depression, becoming more alert, like a person who has hopes and objects, and cares a great deal for life. The household life was a revelation to this social waif. The love that had been a saviour took brighter hues; hitherto there had always been a shadow on it, dear as it was. Now she had the right to love—now she could bring no shame to her lover, and her very step grew lighter.

She would know all about the club case, which was now proceeding, after some delays. There were, of course, constant remands, which protracted the matter almost up to the date fixed for Dora's marriage.

It ended sensationally, for at the final appearance of the defendants George King was missing—to the profit of the newspapers and the rage of the man who had been foolish enough to stand bail for him. Search resulted in failure, and nothing further ever was heard of him that could be relied on as true.

Some rumour came that he was living in a somewhat "shady" part of Paris, keeping the same sort of establishment he had kept in London, only of a lower character, and frequented by a commoner class of people; but when communications were exchanged about him between the French and English police no person answering to George King's description could be found. So probably he had fitted elsewhere, and escaped the punishment his associates incurred.

And the club that had borne his name lost its identity with him, and being turned into a benevolent institution for poor ladies was a sort of satire on its former uses. Clergymen, ladies, bountiful, charitable busybodies, struggling women of gentle birth now came and went through its doors and into the rooms one must think needed purifying, all unwitting of the silent tragedy those rooms might have spoken of.

But that was afterwards. Almost immediately after the trial came Dora's marriage—all brilliance and lightheartedness—and the bride announced to Violet when she was helping her to change her dress—

"I am coming to your marriage—whenever that is to come off. How glad I am"—with a rapturous embrace—"that Morton and I are to have that jolly old house so near Leigh's—and yours soon! Don't colour up, Violet, Morton says he couldn't get on at all away from his chum, as he calls him."

"And you are not jealous?" said Violet, smiling.

"What for? Dear fellow! He isn't less fond of me because he's fond of someone else," and off she went, happy as a bird.

And the next day the party broke up, and the Challoners came up to town—Violet with them, and Erlscourt, who, of course, acted as best man to his old schoolmate. Perhaps he missed Grev, who lingered on that honeymoon that can never come in its pristine glory but once. More likely he was tired of patience, and jealous that his darling should be so often on his sister's hearth instead of his own. And as the weeks went on his studio grew dull, and he listless at his work; and the only bright spot in the day was the evening spent in that staid house—a thing that he had often considered rather a penance.

One night he found his way to Violet's side, as he always did, while the two elders played backgammon. Violet, rousing herself from a reverie, began, after they had been silent awhile:

"I told Emmie to-day I must go home, but she asked me to stay on. I think I had better go. She is very kind, but she will tire of me if I make such long stays. Don't look protesting!" she said, with a sauciness she had begun to show of late. "Everyone is not like you."

"I haven't the chance to tire of you."

Violet gave him a swift look, and coloured a little, while he, possessing himself of her hand, which trembled in his hold, added softly:

"Have I waited long enough?"

"You have been very good," she said, gratefully. "You startled me because I have been so happy. I let things go, and never thought of a change. And, perhaps"—she spoke with some hesitation—"I have been so tossed here and there that I shrink from crossing the threshold of something untied. I don't pain you, do I? You understand?"

"Perfectly. But remember, dearest, I shall lead you over that threshold; and, though I cannot keep trouble away, there will be something in bearing together whatever comes."

She looked into the glowing fire, with her brown eyes shining with perfect contentment.

What pictures was she seeing there, full of beauty to the woman whom home had been an unknown word! No girl of seventeen, wrapped in a first love, ever dreamed with more faith, more vivid hope.

"Yes," she said, still in that dream, her lips parting in a half-smile, "bearing trouble together."

"What are you two talking about?" called Challoner, as the game finished, and he crossed over to the hearth. Erlscourt lifted his head proudly. "My dear boy," said Challoner, laughing, "you look as if you had been getting your own way. Oh, I see! Well, I'm glad; but, my child"—kissing her clear cheek—"you'll have to be married from this house, and I'll give you away," which was of all things what Erlscourt had desired.

As to Emily, sensible woman as she was, she was in raptures—her steady-going raptures—at having so soon a second wedding to arrange for.

Simple as this was, quiet as Violet had begged it might be, the church was crowded—there had been no possibility of letting the bride have her wish. A rising artist and a general favourite was likely to have many friends, known and unknown. Of course, his brother artists came (Greville and Dora among them), and also people of a social rank above his own, and whom he only knew professionally, or in a formal society way. Besides, there was curiosity to see the unknown bride of a man whom everyone said was going to be great. They were not disappointed.

A dowager potent in society said, dropping her eyeglass:

"She's charming. She'll do very well for that handsome Erlscourt, and I shall ask her to my receptions."

"Just the sort of woman you might fancy he'd marry," said some of the artists; "something about her picturesque and more striking than ordinary good looks."

Yet if Violet had been nervous of just this criticism, she did not think of it at all as she knelt by Erlscourt's side. What she did think of was a dimly-lighted cottage-room, of a terrible tempting river, of a prison-tell, and a lonely grave. And when these thoughts weighed on her and oppressed her she lifted her large eyes half in terror, half in appeal, and met the look, tender and protecting, that strengthened and calmed her.

She was not such a bride as Dora had been—not blithe and buoyant, and sparkling with smiles. She came, stepped softly, with downcast eyes, clinging a little to the hand holding hers; but what a gracious presence, what a subdued radiance over this face the other had not known.

There is a happiness that belongs not to youth nor inexperience—altogether of a different sort—that you cannot attain unless you have come through deep waters. And only Greville knew how deep those waters had been—only he of all that throng could have guessed at that flash of memory, and interpreted her upward look.

No one else could dream that this fair woman, who was the wife of a great artist to be, could have a past she would not have anyone know.

Dora was curious when, the very next day, her husband went to Erlscourt's house, and superintended the removal of "Forsaken" to a small room seldom used, opening from the studio, where already some few other paintings hung.

"But why hide it?" she said, half indignantly. "It's one of the loveliest things he ever did! And he not only declares he won't exhibit it again, but sticks it away in an art lumber-room—it's nothing else"—with a withering look round.

"His friends can always see it here," said Greville, imperturbably, "and the connoisseurs."

"I should think he would want to see it himself. The eyes are like Violet's, though I couldn't see it at first. It's a shame!"



"No, it isn't!" said Greville, gravely. "And you mustn't say that to Violet. Ericcourt asked me the night before he was married to see that this picture was moved. He can't bear to part with it, but he can't bear to see it often—and Violet certainly not. I can't say more, Dora dear."

Dora's eyes grew very soft as she nestled to her husband's side, comprehending enough to make her sympathetic, and thankful that she had no such shadows to look back on as Violet.

And, perhaps, in truth, Violet never quite recovered the strain of that seven years. She had always about her that curious grave sweetness one sometimes sees in people who have suffered much, but have not been hardened.

She was speedily the adored of all Ericcourt's artist friends, who came and went just as they had done when he first came back to England.

There was open house all the same—well, not quite the same, for though there was much freedom, there was still a nameless order that showed the woman's presence.

To Violet the life was a sort of heaven. Everything she did daily was a pleasure, from the long mornings of work in the studio—the most loved pleasure of all—to the most trivial daily duty.

Emily said it was not a sufficiently regular household. She couldn't imagine how Violet could endure it. She never knew who was in it, or who was coming to dinner.

Dora, who heard this, went into peals of laughter, and she declared it was a delicious house. And a much humbler person than Mrs. Greville also thought the same, and practically said it; for when Lucie was at last prevailed on to bestow her hand on the too patient Hilliard it was only on condition that she should remain in her mistress's service.

"You'll want someone about you you can trust, ma'am," said she. "You go out so much, and your time is so taken up between the master and all the people here."

"I should like to keep you very much," said Violet, "but I don't know—"

Then she suddenly sprang up with an excitement unusual to her.

"I have it, Lucie! You shall have your trousseau, as I always said you should, and Hilliard the money to furnish my husband told him he'd give him. All the same—wait till I come from my ride—there are the horses!" for Lucie had been dressing her mistress for riding; and Violet ran down, to be swung into her saddle by Ericcourt, and to begin at once to tell him her plan, which, of course, he approved.

The result was that Lucie and Hilliard were married, and the former kept her position in the household, and the latter took the place of the somewhat unsatisfactory person who had acted as factotum, and turned out a treasure.

"You see we never can be too grateful to him," said Violet, when this arrangement took effect, and it was the first time she had alluded since her marriage to what had passed before it. "I think of those times very often, Leigh, happy as I am."

Ericcourt drew her within his arm.

"I know you do," he said, "and you were looking at that picture yesterday!"

"I didn't know you were near; but I can't help it sometimes."

"Don't do it again, darling!" he said. "neither you nor I want to part with that picture, but yet it always brings up bitter memories."

"Not all bitter to me. You forget," said Violet, softly, "that it was you who saved me—you who were guided, I verily believe, to create that dumb witness! And I like to look at it now and then just to be sure that that is Violet, and this the same Violet—your Violet."

"Somehow I think she was always my Violet—from the very first," said Ericcourt. "Perhaps I try too much to keep you from a sorrowful thought; and you, better than I, are also wiser. I remember what George Eliot says about forgetting sorrow, and I think it

true; yet I always want you to be quite happy."

Her eyes were looking up into his as he spoke.

There had been tears in them then—there were tears in them now—those the hot tears of shame and anguish; these only making sweeter the mute, loving question:

"Am I not happy?"

He stooped to kiss those eyes—it was the only answer he could make—put her aside gently, and went back to his easel. And Violet, sitting quietly near him, watched the work, and praised, and criticised, and wondered, womanlike, if she loved him enough who had loved her to the uttermost!

[THE END.]

#### SUNLIGHT IN THE HOME.

Some people seem averse to having the sunlight enter their rooms. They do not realise that apartments in which a person spends any considerable part of the day should be frequently refreshed and brightened by the free entrance of health-giving sunshine. Light is something that can be neither bought nor sold, bartered nor exchanged, and is free to all; so why not make use of it to the most extreme limit of its value? A good part of our lives is spent within doors, in rooms whose windows are screened by drapings and curtains and blinds, all for the adornment of the interior, as well as for the pleasing effect when viewed from the outside. These rooms are, in many instances, lighted by windows so caparisoned that their real value is detracted from by their interior embellishments. The blinds are often drawn so low down that the room is practically always in darkness or in gloom, facilitating the growth and production of the denizens of the germ world. The healthiest and most habitable part of the house is set apart for reception days and important occasions, whilst the least acceptable portion becomes the scene of everyday habitation. Arrange your rooms so that those in which the occupants spend the most of their time are the sunniest and most cheerful. If we cannot have the direct rays of the sun sweep through our houses now and again through the day, we must be content with the indirect rays, but of these there are unlimited supplies. The house on the north side of the street should have the most frequently occupied rooms in front, while that built on the south side of the street should have all the pleasant and most habitual rooms in the rear. If on the west or eastern side, the rooms should be arranged, more or less proportionally, equally in front and rear. A darkened room is not productive of good health, and children or adults cannot be expected to thrive in it any more than a flower will grow and thrive amid perpetual gloom.

#### "AS A FLOWER OF THE FIELD"

She wandered through beautiful gardens,

Where many a floweret grew,

And paused by a bed myrtle-bordered

Where a snowdrop its shadow threw;

And just as she paused, a bright angel

Made choice of that blossom so fair,

He folded it into his bosom

And tenderly sheltered it there.

"Stay, stay, Oh! Celestial spirit,"

With sorrowful heart, she cried,

"It is only the flower of a night-time,

Oh let it, pray let it abide!"

But the angel had stooped and it was not.

And the maiden was longing to know

Why he plucked the bloom of the snowdrop,

That was only beginning to grow.

"God hath sent me to teach thee a lesson,

On the shortness of life," he said.

"The life of mankind and its fleetness

By the fall of this flower can be read;

For the days of mankind are soon numbered,

Whatever their measure may be

Man's life is more brief than this floweret's,

Compared with Eternity.

## Gems

CHARITY must never become a tax; unless there are in it the sweetness and tenderness of free impulse and human inclination it loses its value and purpose.

LIFE is so complicated a game that the devices of skill are liable to be defeated at every turn by air-blown chances, incalculable as the descent of thistle down.

THE all important thing is not to live apart from God, but as far as possible to be consciously with Him. It must needs be that those who look much into His face will become like Him.

EVERY moment you now lose is so much character and advantage lost; as, on the other hand, every moment you now employ usefully is so much time wisely laid out at prodigious interests.

STORM and calm, rain and sunshine, bitter and sweet, action and reaction, are not these the conditions of life? If the wind be fair to-day look for it in our teeth to-morrow, and what is earned by the right hand you are bound to spend with the left.

#### TO THE BABY

Those little eyes closed tight in peaceful

slumber,

That cherub face so gentle in its sleep—

The little life with but the days encumber,

How will it when the years are growing

deep?

Those little lids must bear the years upon

them,

The little soul down underneath their wing.

Oh, know it not, thou child in peaceful slum-

ber!

The weight of all the sorrow that they bring.

## Another New Story

BY

Florence Hodgkinson

The innumerable admirers of this popular and prolific writer will next week have the pleasure of perusing the Opening Chapters of another Love Story from her entertaining pen. It is entitled

# Royal's Promise

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

AUTHOR OF

"GUY FORRESTER'S SECRET,"

"KENNETH'S CHOICE,"

"IVY'S PERIL,"

etc., etc.

In every part this well-told Romance bears the impress of reality, and the reader will note the ingenious manner in which the distinguished author exhibits

#### THE POWER OF LOVE

to clear away the disturbing elements of family hatred.

The Opening Instalment will be given in our next issue.

## HALF SISTERS.

(Concluded from page 251.)

So all the horses were sold—the house thoroughly dismantled—servants, save the very old and trusted ones, dismissed—and Sir Guy and his man departed on some quest of the master's, best known to himself.

"I'll be even with her here," he said, muttering, as he examined his pistols, and packed them carefully with his own hands. "She's my wife, and I don't overlook the insult. One of us shall die, and I don't much care which it is!"

For some days no letter had come to Park Farm, and Annabel grew restless. Could anything be the matter?

On the spare room bed was spread out the pretty dove-coloured satin wedding-dress, the white chip bonnet, with its pearly ribbons and orange flowers and the light-embroidered scarf which was the pink of fashion, and Netta's personal gift.

Everything was in readiness, for it was understood that the wedding was to be by special license, and might take place any day on the bridegroom's arrival, for he may have out short time to stay.

Here, again, was another grievance for the homely people. No banns put up—how could Farmer Wilding countenance such doings? But they supposed the wedding would be legal enough. As for the waste of money and the unseemliness of it, well, the least said the better.

Another day and no letter. Now that all the active preparation was done, the very needlework completed, Annabel had too much leisure to think, and grew more and more anxious and depressed. Outwardly she was calm and composed, but inwardly she was heavy-hearted—more so than an expectant bride should be.

It was not that she doubted her lover, but her case was peculiar. He had been her lover for so short a time before he was called away. The parting had almost closely followed the betrothal, so that as a declared lover, Annabel Wilding scarcely knew Robert Standing.

Try to keep up her spirits how she would the slight disapprobation of the people about her—her father's silent protest, as it were—waxed and perplexed her.

She had walked over to Abbey Mill, and had spent the afternoon nursing the wonderful baby, and was returning along the brick-paved court under the low windows of Park Farm when she heard excited voices.

"It cannot be—it would be unseemly, Robert Standing. Once for all, I can't give any word to it."

He was come. What was her father denying? What was unseemly? The girl tottered weakly, for she was nervous and unstrung.

Then she heard old Mr. Standing's voice in argument.

So he was here too. What did it all mean, and if her lover were there, why was he not speaking?

At the moment, and looking huffed and angry, Robert Standing issued from the doorway as if to cool himself from the heat of debate, not to say dispute, for he held his light hat in his hand, fanning it lightly to his flushed face.

"My darling girl—here at last!" he cried, rapturously. "None of them knew where you had gone—and the time has seemed so long to me—my darling, my pretty one, my wife—"

His raptures were cut short by feeling his darling, his pretty one, his wife, a dead weight in his arms.

For the first time in her life Annabel had fainted.

This further flustered the honest farmer, who was considerably upset already by the news that his prospective son-in-law had less than a week's holiday, all told, and that, to get back to his work as he had promised, the wedding

must take place immediately, "on the morrow," the excited young man said, "if possible."

He had waved the special licence triumphantly before their eyes, and was proportionately startled to find resistance to his wishes in what he inwardly termed old-fashioned, stubborn prejudice.

By virtue of his profession, perhaps, he was used to driving things ahead and carrying all before him. He was checked now with a vengeance, and being so thoroughly surprised and helpless, he was at a loss what to say next. He had told them by letter he considered all along; they had no right to be so taken aback. And then Annabel was out—nobody knew where. Everything was going wrong just when he had expected everything to be so right.

And coming away from them into the open air he found his love, his darling!

And she, to crown his chafing discomfort, had incontinently fainted in his arms.

Annabel Wilding, after her fainting fit, had a long, happy talk with her lover, and found all her unspoken fears and hesitations die away under the charm of his presence. She made no silly affectations to worry and annoy him, neither was she disposed to tantalise him with maidenly coyness that would have been out of place situated as they were. He could not help things being as they were, or he would have been more considerate, so he said, and so she, loving him truly, fully believed.

To see the girl's happy face went a long way to cheer the ruffled spirit of the honest farmer. After all, the lad was not his own master; and, hang it all, he was right in saying he had not deceived them! They had, come to that, been prepared for this very haste all along, scarcely for such rapid haste; still, common sense was common sense, and business was business.

No sooner did the farmer's mind veer to this point than he became Robert's ardent advocate, and put to silence all Mrs. Wilding's grumbling complaints about minor matters, such as invitations to the breakfast, the cooking of the same, and the arrangements for the going and returning to the church.

"After all," he said jollily, "the license is the principal thing next to the husband himself, and that's here all right, and Robert hasn't let the grass grow under his feet about the carriages. They are all ordered at Southampton, and only wait to know which day they are wanted. The wedding-gown is ready—oh, my lass!—so what in Heaven's name are we making so much bother and fuss about?"

"Well, it can't be to-morrow, that's quite settled," said Mrs. Wilding. "That I cannot do; we must let all the people know. We can't make enemies for life of all our oldest and best friends."

And so that same night willing messengers were despatched with notes in all directions, bidding the appointed guests for the next day but one; and not one hour of sleep did Mrs. Wilding or Molly or Sara permit themselves, that sundry and delicate culinary matters should not disgrace them upon the wedding-day.

"It's come to something," said the fully appeased father, "to have the kitchen fire going all night and two coppers fizzling fit to burst themselves. Why not order all the kickshaws from Southampton, mother? You'll wear yourself to fiddlestrings, you will."

"Plenty of time to rest afterwards," snapped Mrs. Wilding. "As it is, plenty that we should have made much better ourselves has to come from the pastrycooks; but if people are all laid up with bilious attacks afterwards at least it won't be my fault."

As for the lovers, they had a blissful time wandering about the near fields and gardens. There was nothing, Mrs. Wilding declared over and over again, that Annabel could do.

That lady slaved her hardest, for she was

not to be outdone by fate, which had tried its best to serve her a scurvy trick. She would get all they could do in spite of it. It should not be said that she had lived for half her years at States Martin for nothing. She knew how things should be, and within her heart was a burning desire to outlive Mrs. Tom Wilding.

Netta's wedding had, Mrs. John considered, been very poorly managed, and folks she knew could hardly be expected to judge by time given, but by the effect produced.

She was fond of Annabel, and intended, so far as her powers went, to do the girl justice. She was making a good marriage, if it was in some respects rather an unusual one. So far so good, as it gave more *clat* to the whole affair.

"How is it, Robert," even yet the name came haltingly from the loving lips, "that you walk a little lame? I have been waiting for you to tell me."

It was the evening before the eventful day, and the lovers were strolling hand in hand through the secluded upper gardens of Park Farm.

The young fellow laughed heartily.

"And so your quick eyes have noticed my infirmity. I hoped to pass muster without its being discovered."

"You have had an accident—"

"Scarcely; you might with more nearness to truth say I had escaped one. The chances were, young woman, four days ago that no husband was forthcoming for you. Are you not eminently thankful that you have not to wear the green willow, but can to-morrow deck yourself out in the mystic orange blossoms instead? How entrancing you will look, my pet!"

"But, Robert, you have not told me about the accident."

He laughed again.

"It was a capital joke. Just as, after an infernally hard push for it, I reached the river, I found the beastly little boat that plies to catch the packet at Calais—you see our new railways will stop all that—was just on the point of starting, and the captain and the sailors did not seem inclined to wait for me, so I took my valise and hat-box and chucked them on board, and as the last rope was shipped or drawn, or whatever in their jargon they call it, I sprang from the quay right on to the paddle-box. There was a shout of horror, and then a clapping of hands and hurrahing. I had barked my shins a bit, but I was there, and now, for all their mulish incivility, I am here, and although a bit lame, able to tell the tale."

"But oh, Robert, dear!" this for the very first time in her life, "you might have been killed!"

"It would have been a little awkward, no doubt, if I had missed my jump; but I'm a pretty fair judge of distances, and getting on that boat meant England and you, my dear. It was neck or nothing, you see, and I hope you will excuse my slight lameness. It might have been worse, you see. More wedding presents!" he laughed, seeing Mrs. Wilding gesticulating at the lower gate for them to come in. "Really, the people are very generous to you, Mrs. Standing, in spite of their disapprobation of me. By-the-bye, I may as well deal out my presents, eh, as the ceremony is so early to-morrow? I've got some pearls for you, pet, besides the wedding ring, and I've got a magnificent affair in the brooch line for Mrs. Wilding, and I've got some stunning bead necklaces for Molly and Sara."

"Oh, Robert, mother will never let them wear them!"

He looked rather taken aback at this, but summed it up by declaring "all they had to do was to get married themselves, and then they could do what they liked, and wear what they liked."

At nine o'clock the next morning three wedding carriages, all with white horses and huge favours, stood in imposing array at the



stackyard-gate, for no further could any vehicle approach the doors of Park Farm.

It was all the better for the crowd of on-lookers, since the bridal procession had to walk right down through the grassy paths with their box edges.

It was a clear, lambent day, with the sort of breezy air blowing that is especially calculated to put vexed minds into good humour with themselves and their surroundings.

Hence all the guests were jovial, and the wedding party itself was gay to a fault. The farmer was pleased and delighted to see how the village had outdone itself in decorations.

There was even a rough triumphal arch, which had once done duty when a Royal marriage had taken place. Now it was a mass of May-bloom and lilac, which scented the air, and formed a pretty background to the lettered device, "May they be happy."

The old lych gate was covered with ferns and bluebells, and the school children mustered in force and struck up a bridal procession hymn as they strewed their floral trophies for the bride to walk on.

All this showed in certain contradistinction to the quietness of Netta's wedding, and flattered Mrs. Wilding, because she had desired much for her favourite. As she said, confidentially to an especial friend and crony, "the Stubbs, although rich, were not popular."

The bells rang out a gladsome peal. "And well they might," said old Jones, the sexton, "seeing as 'ow the bridegroom sent down a five-pound note the night afore. What bells wouldn't ring?"

Robert Standing looked on, pleased and content with his choice. The calm dignity of Annabel pleased him, for he was fastidious to a fault in the ways of womankind.

And now the dove-coloured satin was changed for the grey *tabinette*, with its cosy tippet and hood, in which the "wife" was to travel the first stage of her important journey.

"Ay, Rob, my son!" said old Mr. Standing, robbing vigorously at his eyes with a curiously large spotted silk handkerchief, "over there in Frenchland maybe, they'll take you two for a man and a woman, but you're only just a couple of children when all's said and done."

Everybody kissed Annabel again and again, and Netta broke down entirely under what was to her, perhaps, a trying ordeal.

Her husband was alarmed at the violence of her grief, and, manlike, feared a scene. Somehow, he thought just then of that day in sweet Atherley Woods, when he had found her in much the same condition.

And she had been a good wife to him, and his child would bear comparison with anybody's.

"Come, Netta," he said, with a tenderness in his voice she had never heard before; "don't go back to old times—'tis never any good—bear up, for all our sakes, or maybe folks'll be thinking it queer."

Molly and Sara almost swallowed the bride in capacious embraces, and Robert Standing had an idea afterwards that he was likewise included, and that they both kissed him, but he was never quite sure on the point.

Once more goes the bridal procession through the tall hollyhocks.

They go hastily down to the open stackyard-gate, where stands the chariot with its grey, flower-decked horses. The bells clash out a furious peal. Into the carriage with them stepped the two respective fathers, who were to see them off at the docks.

The postboy cracked his whip, as I believe only these postboys of long ago can crack a whip. The horses gave a wild lurch forward in the loose straw-strown yardway; but, gaining the road, they settled down to their work with a will, and dashed round the corner at a rattling pace, the easily hung chaise swinging as if in time to the peeling bells, which might well have been echoing:

"So fair a bride shall leave her home

"So fair a bride shall pass to-day."

[THE END.]

## Facetiæ

HARDLY a week passes but we are reminded that we are constantly surrounded by perils seen and kerosene.

He was fond of singing revival hymns, and his wife named the baby Fort, so that he would want to hold it.

"You are not expected to eat the enamel," said the waiter to the man endeavouring to get the last drop of soup.

To bashful correspondent: The first thing for you to do is to pop the question; the second to question the pop.

"Is your father a man of sedentary habits?" "Sedentary? Well, I rather think he is. He sits on me every time he sees me!"

THE burglar who drugged a doctor and then ransacked the house should be arrested for practising medicine without a licence.

It is said that whisky is being made from old rags. Any clothes observer will remember instances where whisky has made rags.

Two months hence the signal service will predict: "Spring followed by summer." And the prediction will probably be verified.

He: "My income is small, and perhaps it is cruel of me to take you from your father's roof." She: "I don't live on the roof!"

"Oh, Maud, what do you think? My canary bird has laid an egg!" "That ain't nothin' much! My pa laid two stair carpets yesterday!"

AFTER CHURCH.—Spoggs: "Was it not disgraceful the way in which Smiggs snored in church to-day?" Stuggs: "I should think it was. Why, he woke us all up."

FOND WIFE: "Would you believe that Mrs. Eccles, next door, speaks seven languages?" Fond Husband: "Certainly I would. She's got tongue enough to speak fifty!"

PATIENT: "That's a big bill you sent, doctor. You only looked at my tongue and prescribed quinine." Doctor: "You forget, my dear sir, that I also felt your pulse."

"THESE are hard times," said the young debt collector. "Every place I went to-day I was requested to call again but one, and that was when I dropped in to see my girl."

A FASHIONABLE authority says a genteel carver always sits when he carves. This is probably true, and it is also true that he frequently takes the roast goose into his lap.

A TIRESOME PERFORMANCE.—De Faggs: "A fine audience this? Why, a dog-fight would draw a bigger crowd." Gagley (wearily): "Yass; but a dog-fight only tires the dogs, you know."

"PETER," said old Mrs. Bentley to her husband, "what is this Socialist doctorin' I've heard about?" "Well, I dunno," replied old Mr. Bentley. "I s'pose it's a new-fangled cure of some kind. I ain't sot on any of 'em."

TWO CHEAP COSTUMES.—Perkins: "And so you're going to the fancy dress ball? What costume are you going to wear?" Smart Alec: "I think I'll borrow your summer suit and go as a tramp. What are you going to wear?" Perkins: "I guess I'll put on your diagonal Prince Albert and go as a looking-glass."

OLD GENT (evidently under great mental strain): "See here, sir; I want to speak to you, sir. You were at my house until very late last night, and after my daughter went to her room I heard her sobbing for an hour. You're a villain, sir, and I've a great mind—" Young Man: "Sobbing?" O. G.: "Yes, sir. How dared you to insult—" Y. M.: "I wouldn't think of such a thing. Believe me." O. G. (temperately): "What did you say to her, sir?" Y. M.: "I merely remarked that I was too poor to marry."

We desire to endorse the remark that the doctor who does not bring cheerfulness to a sick-room with him has mistaken his calling. He was intended for an undertaker.

CUSTOMER: "Please chalk up the amount of these little purchases." Grocer: "I can't; I am all out of chalk." Customer: "Ah, I see! You have used it up in your milk."

REPROVING youth for the exercise of his fists, a schoolmaster said, "We fight with our heads here." The youth reflected for a brief while, and replied that butting hadn't been considered fair at his last school.

PROFESSOR: "I regret to say, sir, that you will never make a success as a public speaker." Pupil: "Indeed! Why not?" "You enunciate distinctly every word you utter. That defect, sir, is fatal."

"Do you ever observe how very devotional Deacon Buffman is?" asked a good lady of her husband. "Yes, my dear; the deacon is very devotional. He always keeps his head bowed in prayer till the contribution-box has passed."

DOBSON: "I've just heard of your marriage, old boy." HOBSON (sadly): "Yes, I was married three months ago." DOBSON: "Well, it isn't too late to offer congratulations, of course." HOBSON: "A little late, Dobson, a little late."

HUSBAND (airily—they had just returned from their wedding trip): "If I'm not home from the club by—ah—ten, love, you won't wait—" Wife (with appalling firmness): "No, dear; I'll come for you!" He was back at 9.45 sharp.

YOUNG LADY: "Will you please give me a small bottle of eyether?" Drug Clerk: "Of what, miss?" "Of eyether, please." "Eyether! Eyether! I do not think we have it in store." "Oh, yes. I'm sure you have. It is sometimes called ether by ignorant people."

"ARE you the man who compiled a list of dead beats?" "Yes, sir; but if I have made any mistakes—" "You run in my name as being able to pay, but wouldn't do it?" "Yes, sir; but—" "Here's twenty-five dollars for you. That send-off got me a job of treasurer to a dramatic company."

"I WOULDN'T cut that tree down if I were you," said a visitor to a farmer who was about to chop down a large oak. "Remember that after you fell it you cannot replace it." "Can't I?" replied the farmer. "You don't know. After I chop it down what is to prevent me from chopping it up?"

"WELL, poor Smith! He is rid of that talkative wife of his." "What! I—I hadn't heard—" "Why, she fell headforemost into a tubful of cream this morning." "Laud sakes! Did she drown?" "No; but her chin churned forty pounds of fine butter before she could be pulled out of the cream."

OLD GENTLEMAN (listening to the shouts of laughter that came from an adjoining room, to hostess): "The young people seem to be enjoying themselves this evening, Mrs. Hobson." Hostess: "Yes, they are playing whist. Would you like to take a hand, Mr. Grizzly?" Old Gentleman (who has written treatises on whist for the *Edinburgh Review*): "Thanks, my dear madam; but I don't know one card from another."

DAWKY CAMPBELL went to build a small out-house of brick. After the usual fashion of bricklayers, he wrought from the inside; and, having the material close beside him, the walls were rising fast when dinner-time arrived, and with it his son Jock, who brought his father's dinner. With honest pride in his eye, Dawky looked at Jock over the wall on which he was engaged, and asked, "Hoo d'ye think I'm getting on?" "Famous, fether! But hoo dae ye get oot? Ye've forgot the door." One look around him showed Dawky that his son was right; but, looking kindly at him, he said, "Man Jock, you've got a gran' heid on ye; ye'll be an architect yet as shure's yer father's a mason."

# EDEN'S SACRIFICE

## CHAPTER VI.

**W**ITH anything but a light heart Bertie Staunton entered the apartments that had witnessed the greatest happiness of his life. His face, almost too beautiful for a man, was clouded with deep feeling, yet, as he opened the door softly, and called his wife's name, a smile of unutterable love was upon his lips.

"Eden!"

A silence that seemed almost tangible answered him. He repeated the name again, going to the door of their bedchamber and opening it gently. Still the same hideous silence.

An irrepressible shiver seized him like that which attacks a visitor at a vault. He glanced about half bewildered by his own sensations. A superstitious dread of an unnameable calamity was upon him. The smile, instead of fading, had frozen upon his lips. He stood stupidly gazing about him.

"What a fool I am!" he cried, at last, endeavouring to shake off the torpor that threatened him. "She has gone out. Of course that is it, and I stand here trying to imagine every impossible evil. Why, to be sure she has gone out and there is a note from her, bless her dear little heart."

He raised the paper and pressed it passionately to his lips, then opened it.

As he read all the colour that revived hope had lent faded, and a pallor nothing short of death overspread his face.

He reeled like a ship in a heavy gale, his eyes were glued to the paper, his hair clung about his damp brow like paste.

A moment thus, the horror in his eyes beyond expression, then he thrust the paper in his pocket, and drawing his hat over his eyes, he strode from the room and the hotel. His brain never seemed so clear, though his face was distorted beyond recognition.

A hansom stood in the street near the door. "To Scotland Yard!" he exclaimed, hoarsely "and five shillings extra if you get there quick!"

He sprang in and closed the door. He never could recall his thoughts as he whirled rapidly along over the smooth asphalt; but one thing he realised only too plainly, that all effort upon his part to find her would be worse than useless.

To the superintendent he showed the letter, and after a very few words of explanation detectives were sent in every direction; but to no purpose.

About twelve o'clock that night, jaded and hopeless, Bertie Staunton again wandered into the hotel. He looked like a corpse that had been put in motion by electricity.

In a stupid, emotionless way he paused before Malcolm Carleton's door and knocked. His linen was soiled, his clothing in disorder, his eyes bloodshot.

The door was opened by Malcolm Carleton himself, well groomed and nonchalant. Behind him Staunton could see Bertha cool and disdainful, her bare neck and arms gleaming like marble above a dress of creamy white. The mocking, radiant face was maddening to the anguished man.

At his brother-in-law's wild appearance Malcolm Carleton shrank back in alarm.

"In Heaven's name, what has happened?" he gasped.

Stepping into the room Bertie closed the door behind him.

His eyes were upon Bertha rather than Carleton as he answered,—

"I have come to tell you that your sister is dead."

"Dead! Eden, dead!" gasped Malcolm, hoarsely. "Are you mad?"

"I wish to Heaven I were. She has drowned herself, believing that her death would save her family from disgrace."

"Disgrace!"

"Yes, disgrace. She must have known that that woman is not your wife, and she must have believed her to be mine."

"You must be mad!"

Leaning against the door, a cold perspiration covering face and hands, Malcolm Carleton could think of nothing beyond those words. A numbness was gradually creeping over him that rendered him motionless and incapable of thought.

"Look at that woman," cried Bertie, pointing in Bertha's direction, "and ask yourself if I am mad. She is the vilest of adventuresses. She is neither your wife nor mine, though I believed her to be mine for a tortuous time, and several other men equally insane have believed the same. She is the legal wife of Rupert Howard, one of the greatest scoundrels this country has ever known. She is an adventuress, an unconvicted thief, and, before Heaven, a murderess!"

"Stop!" Malcolm Carleton's voice was hoarse beyond recognition. His eyes had caught the gleam that belongs only to the maddened animal. "What you have said is a lie from beginning to end, and you shall answer to me with your dastardly life for your cowardly assault upon my wife's honour!"

"Fool!" exclaimed Staunton, fiercely. "Look at that woman, and ask her if I have lied."

Carleton turned involuntarily and glanced in Bertha's direction.

She had risen and was leaning against the arm of the chair, her face white and quivering, while the old mocking smile lingered about her lips. It gave a ghastly effect to her countenance.

She seemed to have forgotten Malcolm utterly, and in a tone of reproach addressed Bertie.

"You are cruel," she exclaimed, densely. "I did not think you would revenge yourself upon a woman. If you had but loved me I might have been different and happy. You know that I worshipped you, and I am not a woman to love lightly."

A gesture of withering disgust interrupted her, and from reproach her expression changed to the brilliancy of hatred.

With the quickness and something of the peculiar grace of the leopard she sprang to Malcolm Carleton's side, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Do you not understand?" she cried, excitedly, "that he is trying to deceive you? He has wearied of your sister, and now he comes here to—"

But the acting came too late.

With no gentle movement Carleton shook the hand from his arm, and stepped backward. Bertha understood the motion more quickly than she could have comprehended words.

She threw up her head defiantly, and laughed scornfully.

"Why don't you tell me that the game is up?" she exclaimed, coldly. "I confess that for once my plans have miscarried a trifle. However, the settlement of four thousand pounds was rather neat for so brief a servitude as I have had, and perhaps I should thank you after all, Bertie. My one regret is that I failed in my revenge upon that little baby-faced creature that stole your love from me. I had planned it so well."

"Woman, have you absolutely no heart?"

"No! If I had I might have told you this afternoon that I heard her lie down on a couch beside that door; that I knew she was listening to every word of our conversation. But I didn't think she would act like such a fool. I thought she would keep silent to save her beloved name."

Malcolm Carleton laid his hand heavily upon her shoulder.

"You are not a woman, but a demon!" he exclaimed, in a voice that brought an expression of fear to her reckless face. "Take care that I do not kill you as I might a rabid dog. Enter that room, and don't dare to leave it until I give you permission! I have no more right to turn you loose upon the world than I would a tigress."

There was something in the man's manner that she dared not disobey.

She had sneered at his weakness, his effeminacy, and yet in that moment she feared him as she had never feared man before.

With something of the expression of a conquered wild beast she allowed him to thrust her into the adjoining room, and listened in silence as he turned the key upon her.

Then Malcolm Carleton faced Bertie Staunton.

"Where is my sister?" he asked, dully.

For answer Bertie took from his pocket the letter she had left, and watched his brother-in-law as he read it.

As he finished its perusal and realised what his act of folly had cost them both, Malcolm fell into a chair, and burying his face in his hands, sobbed aloud.

With folded arms and bent head Bertie Staunton looked on, but no tear came to relieve the burning heat in his eyes and brain. They seemed on fire!

There was an ache in his bosom like the cut of a knife, but he could neither weep nor exclaim. He seemed dumb, dead!

He was unconscious of time, and did not realise that nearly half-an-hour had elapsed before Carleton spoke. He started and sighed.

"Tell me!" Carleton exclaimed, huskily. "Events are crowding so strangely that I don't seem to comprehend. What was Eden to you?"

"My legal wife!" answered Staunton, proudly.

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried Carleton, fervently, grasping Bertie's hand. "Now let us think what is to be done."

"I have thought until my brain seems paralysed. It is all clear enough. We must find her body if we can; but this secret must be buried with us. Eden's sacrifice must not be rendered of no account. She died, evidently believing that would save your honour, your name from disgrace. We must take care that no reflection comes upon it for her sake."

## CHAPTER VII.

Something more than a year had elapsed, and cyclic progress brings change in its train. It is the immutable law of nature.

Eden, while not learning to forget, was calm in her sorrow.

Mrs. Marchmont treated her as she might have done a daughter, and Eden loved her in that enthusiastic, devoted way that was at once her peculiarity and her charm.

Sylvia worshipped her young governess, and with a sense of great satisfaction Mrs. Marchmont and Walter watched the colour slowly return to the pale cheeks, the brilliancy to the dark eyes, the elasticity to the quick, graceful step.

And as her spirits grew again she became dearer to each of them until, unconsciously, she became the happiness of both.

Upon the cool balcony of their summer residence Mrs. Marchmont sat in her own low, easy chair, her soft, white hair blown gently by the breeze, and at her feet her son lounged lazily, his head resting lovingly against her knee.

Both were watching a scene upon the lawn that was sheltered from the sun by huge trees, and a smile of affectionate pleasure was upon the lips of either.

Like two kittens at play, Eden and Sylvia were romping, pelting each other with daisies and buttercups, endeavouring to catch each other, and indulging in every kind of childish amusement, until at last, overheated and exhausted, Eden flung herself upon the bal-



cony and began fanning vigorously with her sun-hat.

Sylvia was directly behind her, her yellow curls tossed about her flushed face deliciously. "I'm afraid you've over-exerted yourself, dear," said Mrs. Marchmont, as she observed Eden's quick breathing.

"Not she!" cried Sylvia, gaily. "You don't know her. She'll be ready for another run in five minutes. Besides, it's our last day, you know."

"Last day?" repeated Walter Marchmont, in form of a question.

"Yes," returned the child, with a half pout. "To-morrow those horrid people are coming, and we shall have to behave. Bah! I hate it. I don't see why you couldn't have been happy with just us."

Walter Marchmont frowned. He disliked to confess even to himself that those invitations had been rather forced upon him, and that it was against his own will that he had requested his mother to second him. But so it was, and since the invitations had been given he seemed to chafe under them more and more.

He arose with something like relief as he saw the dog-cart coming around the drive to the door.

"Put on your hat, Eden," he said, authoritatively, "and come with me to Morely's farm. The drive is shaded nearly all the way."

An observer would have noticed the lack of sentiment in the quickness with which she arose to obey, but Walter Marchmont saw nothing in it.

She kissed his mother and Sylvia with the freedom of one accustomed to it, and sprang lightly into the cart.

Walter looked for a moment into his mother's smiling eyes, and took his seat beside her.

For more than a mile the utmost silence prevailed, the horse jogging along at a slow trot. Then, unable to preserve the quiet longer, Eden laid her hand gently upon Marchmont's arm.

"Are you and the dominie both going to sleep?" she asked, smilingly.

He looked into the lovely face for some time without speaking, then asked, suddenly:

"Do you believe in presentiments, Eden?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because I have one."

"The heat has got into your head and made you superstitious. What is your presentiment about?"

"I can hardly tell you. I feel as though I were on the eve of some great calamity."

"I'll tell you what it is," laughed Eden. "You are going to fall in love with the lady who is to arrive to-night."

Marchmont started painfully.

"How absurd you are," he exclaimed.

"Not at all," answered Eden, lightly. "She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"Very."

"And wealthy?"

"Yes."

"Of good family?"

"Her brother is a baronet and a member of an excellent English family."

"Then why should you call your falling in love with her a calamity?"

"I did not. I have never considered the possibility of such a thing, because when a man's whole heart is given to one woman he cannot love another."

He was not looking at her, but over the horse's head into the white road, that contained shadows of the leaves overhead. He seemed to be speaking more to himself than to her.

"I am sorry I asked them, because our simple little home-life, that has grown so strangely sweet to me, will be necessarily disturbed. I can't think why I was ever such a fool. I say, Eden, did you ever think—like so many girls do—that it would be a nice thing to have a title, and have people call you Lady So-and-so?"

"I don't know that I ever thought of it at all."

"But would you?" he persisted.

"I don't think that either the title or the absence of it would make any difference to me if I loved the man."

"I have an idea that Sir Wilfred Gordon will fall in love with you. He is very handsome," said Marchmont, gloomily.

Eden laughed heartily.

"Do you actually think he would so condescend?" she asked, playfully. "Now that would be a calamity."

"It would if you married him."

"Why?"

"Because it would take all the sun out of the universe for me."

"Mr. Marchmont!"

"Don't look so surprised. You must have seen for months how I loved you."

"Indeed I never suspected it."

"And does the knowledge, now that I have told you, pain you until the tears come to your eyes?"

"It is not like you to be bitter and cruel."

"I know, dear," remorsefully. "I am not myself to-day. I should not have told you this until I was sure of your love; but I have lost mastery of myself, Eden"—taking her hand and drawing it upon his knee—"you have grown very, very dear to me since—I don't just know when. It seems as if it must always have been so. I never loved a woman before, and I am not an adept at telling of it; but I think my undivided devotion would make you happy as my wife."

For the first time he noticed that she was shivering as if with an ague. Half alarmed he glanced into her face.

Her lips and about her mouth were blue, while great drops of icy perspiration stood under her eyes.

"Eden, what is it?" cried Marchmont, betraying his agitation in his voice.

"Nothing!" she answered, hoarsely, her teeth chattering curiously. "You—you startled me, that is all."

"Is my love, then, so hateful to you?"

"No, it is not that—not that! But you are mistaken—you must be mistaken. You forget that I am only your niece's governess."

"I forget nothing. You are the woman I love—the one of all the world whom I have selected for my wife. I am very much in earnest—terribly in earnest. I have never tried to curb my growing love, but have gloried in it as the very greatest happiness that life held. It would be like losing the soul out of my body, with the shell destined to live, to be robbed of all hope of you now. Why, my darling—"

"Hush!" she interrupted, wildly. "Oh, for the love of Heaven, hush! I have no right to listen to such words from you. Think what you are saying! Until one short year ago I never knew you. My past—what do you know of that?"

"What do I care to know of it?" he asked, passionately. "That it was as pure as the life of an angel I am convinced. What else could make a difference to me?"

She did not answer, but with a despairing gesture covered her white face with her hands and groaned.

Walter Marchmont started as if she had struck him. An expression of incalculable horror came to his face, a pain struck through his heart like the slash of a knife.

For a moment he felt that he almost hated her, then all that was most manly and noble in him arose to the surface, and with all his great, generous heart he pitied her.

"Eden, I—I scarcely know what to say to you, dear!" he exclaimed, after a long, painful silence; "but my whole heart and soul have gone out in sympathy for you. Forget what I have said if you can—forget that I have ever wished to be more than your faithful friend—your brother—if remembrance distresses you. I know that you have suffered—that you do suffer, and the greatest misery I could have would be to feel that I had added to it. Eden, what can I say to make you forgive me?"

"There is nothing for me to forgive," she answered, dully. "You have done me the greatest honour that a man could do a woman. The fault is all mine. I should have told you the hideous story of my life long ago—"

"No, no!" interrupted Marchmont, quickly, putting out his hand as if to ward off a blow. "Don't tell me. I—I cannot have you speak of what is painful to you; and no matter what it is, my affection would remain unchanged. You won't let this conversation interfere with our lives, will you? You will let everything go on just the same as though it had never been?"

"How good, how generous you are!" "That is not an answer," feverishly. "I should despise myself if I saw that this had affected you in any way. Promise me that you will forget it?"

"I promise."

"And that you will look upon me with the same brotherly affection as formerly?"

"Yes."

"That is well. And, Eden, while I shall never seek to know anything of your past—while I don't wish to know it—remember that whatever it has been it can make no difference to me. I would give my life if it would be of benefit to you; and if you should need advice or assistance, everything I am and have is yours. You trust me?"

"With all my heart, my noble, generous friend."

Before he knew what she was doing, she had lifted his hand to her lips and kissed it. A great tear, that was a gem in the crown of his manhood, fell upon the lapel of his coat.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

With his head buried upon his folded arms, which rested upon a table, Walter Marchmont sat waging war with the bitterness in his own soul.

All the horror that he had taken such pains to conceal from Eden was expressed in his dejected attitude and an occasional groan that forced itself through his lips.

At last, when he had succeeded in calming his emotions to a certain extent, he lifted his head and leaned it upon his hand, gazing out of the window with eyes that saw nothing.

"I am a fool!" he whispered to himself, a flush of something very like shame dyeing his cheeks, nevertheless. "Does not suffering expiate a sin? Heaven knows she has suffered! Why should I allow a memory of an error to spoil both our lives? Poor little Eden—poor, unhappy child! She did not say she did not love me. I was a fool—a fool! I will forget that past. I will never let her tell me—never; then I shall not have the certainty to brood over, but I will win her, and I will make her cease to remember the old bitterness in the new happiness. Heaven bless her! Heaven bless her!"

Willfully banishing the subject from his mind, he arose and rang for his valet, and a moment later was getting himself into the dress suit that had been laid across the chair for his use.

Walter Marchmont had rarely ever appeared

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to such advantage as he did when he descended to the handsome drawing-room half-an-hour later. A smile of almost reckless brilliancy was upon his lips, his eyes gleamed with a fire that was new and strange.

Mrs. Marchmont was there before him, her violet silk cut away at throat and arms, with bits of rare old lace here and there, and near her sat Eden upon a small divan, a little pale creature in a simple costume of unadorned black. Sylvia was beside her, pulling at the rings of dark hair.

"Why, Eden, not dressed yet?" cried Marchmont, gaily. "Come, this won't do!"

"She says she's tired and won't dress," pouted Sylvia. "Make her, Uncle Walter. She looks horrid!"

"Why, of course she'll dress," laughed Marchmont. "Come, Eden, we want the white lace to-night, and mind that you have some colour in those pale cheeks when you come down."

"But—"

"No buts, please. I mean to assert my rights as master for once."

He took her hand and drew her to her feet. She glanced up at him with a tremulous, tearful smile. He pressed her hand reassuringly, then, fearful of sobbing aloud, Eden broke away from him and ran from the room.

"She doesn't seem well since she came in from her drive," exclaimed Mrs. Marchmont, solicitously. "You shouldn't keep her in the sun so much, Walter. She is not strong."

"Oh, yes, she is. I think she has one of the finest constitutions I ever saw. Hark! Isn't that a carriage?"

Mrs. Marchmont looked at her son curiously.

She was at a loss to comprehend the unusual vivacity of his manner. Was it possible that he could be in love with this woman whom she had never seen, but was waiting even then to receive? An involuntary sigh arose in her heart.

As she looked at him anxiously a brougham rolled up to the door, and Marchmont went upon the steps to meet his guests.

Sir Wilfred Gordon sprang from the carriage, and returned Marchmont's greeting warmly. He was a tall, athletic, graceful man, with a dark, passionate face and beautiful eyes, that recalled portraits of the heroes of the Orient. His was a face and form that woman's eyes would follow eagerly and men's curiously.

His companion, who smiled bewilderingly upon Marchmont as he lifted her from the carriage, was an exact contrast in complexion and of unusual beauty. Her pale-gold hair laid upon her forehead in little, caressing rings, her eyes were of infantile sweetness and loveliness. Her pale-grey travelling-dress was infinitely becoming.

But, in spite of her beauty, Mrs. Marchmont was not as cordial as was her wont when her son presented Miss Gordon. To Sir Wilfred she was even less gracious.

"And now I will present you to the mistress of the house," laughed Marchmont, "my niece, Sylvia Fane."

"What a dear little fairy!" exclaimed Miss Gordon, enthusiastically, kneeling beside Sylvia. "My dear, I hope we shall be great friends."

To Marchmont's amazement Sylvia drew herself up with the air of a *grande dame* whose dignity has suffered.

She had never developed any of the propensities of the *enfant terrible*, and it was, therefore, all the more surprising when she answered:

"I am not a fairy, and grandma says it is very rude to address a person the first time one sees her as 'my dear.' I don't think we shall ever be friends."

Mrs. Marchmont and her son were intensely shocked, but Sir Wilfred laughed heartily.

Fortunately at that juncture Mrs. Marchmont's maid came in to conduct Miss Gordon to her apartments, and Walter went away with Sir Wilfred.

While he was away Eden re-entered the drawing-room.

She was still pale, but exceedingly lovely in her creamy lace gown.

"They have come!" she asked of Mrs. Marchmont.

"Yes," with an uncontrollable sigh. "She is very beautiful, and her brother is one of the handsomest men I ever saw."

"She is not half so pretty as you are, Eden!" cried Sylvia, indignantly, "and she's not a bit nice."

"You should not say that, Sylvia," answered Eden, reprovingly.

"I will! I don't like her, and neither does grandma. I saw it the moment she came in. It won't be like our nice home at all while she is here. Uncle Walter," as the door opened to admit him, "what made you ask that horrid woman here?"

"Hush, dear! You must not say that. It is neither polite nor kind. I hope for my sake that you will not speak to her again as you did to-day."

Rebellious tears arose in the child's eyes.

"I will not speak to her at all if I can help it!" she answered, passionately. "I hate her! I knew she was going to make trouble the moment I saw her."

Marchmont glanced at Eden uncomfortably. There was something in the child's words that brought back his presentiment of the morning.

Eden took the little thing in her arms and endeavoured to comfort her.

But before she had succeeded the door opened and Sir Wilfred Gordon entered.

He appeared even handsomer in his evening dress than he had in travelling costume, and as he was presented to Eden his magnificent dark eyes were aglow with admiration.

"Were you ever in Corfu, Miss Chasemore?" he asked, with a decidedly English accent.

"Never!"

"You must pardon me for asking, but you are so like a portrait of a Greek girl that I once saw there that anyone might readily mistake you for the original. It was purchased by the Earl of Douglas, and was considered the most valuable addition to his celebrated collection."

Marchmont frowned.

His high spirits had suddenly vanished. Sir Wilfred's admiration could not be mistaken, and it angered Sir Wilfred's host.

But the baronet was unconscious of that fact. He maintained his position beside Eden, watching, without impertinence, the play of her expressive features, the movement of her graceful hands.

Then suddenly he saw her start. Every particle of the lovely crimson faded from her lovely lips; her face and eyes were rigid as death; her hands clasped each other until the sharp nails made great blue marks in the delicate flesh.

Sir Wilfred glanced up to see the cause of her agitation.

Miss Gordon had just entered the room.

The eyes of the two women met, and while the smile never faded from Miss Gordon's lips, the pearl stick of a magnificent feather fan were crushed beneath the nervous clutch of her long, slender fingers.

Sir Wilfred glanced from one to the other curiously, but cautiously.

"Miss Gordon, allow me to present you to Miss Chasemore, the daughter of the house," Walter Marchmont was saying.

But both women bowed without knowing clearly what they were doing.

"Miss—Chasemore?" Miss Gordon interrogated, turning her eyes from Eden to Marchmont.

"Yes."

Again Miss Gordon's gaze was fixed upon Eden.

"You must have thought me very rude," she said, in a curious voice; "but your face is so strangely familiar that I thought we must have met before. I beg your pardon."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the

room: for a moment, broken at last by Walter Marchmont.

"Your brother spoke of Eden's resemblance to a portrait he saw in Corfu," he said.

"Probably the same resemblance struck you." "Doubtless," answered Miss Gordon, dreamily.

It was late in the evening before Sir Wilfred had an opportunity of speaking with his sister alone.

"Who is she?" he whispered, hurriedly.

Miss Gordon laid her hand upon his arm with almost superhuman force.

"She is the sister of Malcolm Carleton, and wife of Bertram Staunton, whom both believe to be dead," she answered, hoarsely, "and she has recognised me."

Sir Wilfred straightened himself up suddenly, a hard, stony expression marring the beauty of his features.

"The devil!" he ejaculated. "This is—Remember, Bertha, everything depends upon the success of this move. It must not fail, at whatever cost to Eden Staunton. You understand?"

"I do. You may trust me."

#### CHAPTER IX.

"I look as though I had lived through twenty years of torture in one little night," whispered Eden, the following morning, as she looked carefully at her reflection in the mirror. "It will cause comment, and necessitate—a lie! Oh!" flinging up her arms despairingly, "I thought I had done with all that; and just as I fancied I had found peace, if not happiness, all the old misery is before me again! Why has she come here? and who is that man who calls himself a baronet and her brother? I ought to tell Mr. Marchmont, and yet I dare not—I dare not! It would bring out all that hideous story that I have sacrificed everything to conceal. Malcolm would be disgraced—Bertie a convict! Oh, I cannot—I cannot!"

She flung herself upon her knees before a chair, and sobbed bitterly.

Half-an-hour later she descended to the breakfast-room, wan and haggard, but explained it away with the always serviceable plea of headache.

"You must show Miss Gordon the rose garden, Eden!" Mrs. Marchmont exclaimed, a few hours later. "It will make the time drag less heavily while the gentlemen are inspecting the stables. We are very proud of our rose-garden, Miss Gordon. Some of the specimens are unusually fine!"

"They are my favourite flowers," returned Miss Gordon, sweetly. "Will it increase your headache, Miss Chasemore?"

"Not at all," answered Eden, nervously. "Will you come, Sylvia?"

"No," replied the child, shortly. "I hate roses."

Eden turned away with a sigh.

She dreaded to be for a moment alone with the woman who had played so tragical a part in her heart history, yet realised that they must understand each other. She must know what treachery was meant to Walter Marchmont—to the son of the woman who had been a more than mother to her.

She tied on her sun hat with trembling fingers, and lifted her eyes wistfully to Miss Gordon's cool, smiling countenance.

"I am ready," she said, simply.

"And I."

Pausing to kiss Mrs. Marchmont with a curious, lingering fondness that seemed increased tenfold that morning, Eden passed from the room, followed by the dainty, exquisite woman upon whom Mrs. Marchmont could not look without a shiver.

"What a charming woman Mrs. Marchmont is!" remarked Miss Gordon, as she and Eden paused beside a magnificent Camille de Rohan bush. "Are you nearly related?"

"We are not related at all," replied Eden, coldly.

"No! You seem quite like mother and daughter. I suppose you have always lived with her?"



Eden lifted her eyes, allowing them to rest with quiet scorn upon her questioner.

"Of what use is this masquerading between you and me?" she asked, haughtily. "Do you think I have not recognised you?"

Miss Gordon did not even change colour. She smiled calmly into the quivering face, and with utmost nonchalance seated herself upon a rustic bench.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, coolly. "I see our conversation is liable to be a long one, and I was never able to stand much. You won't? Then you will pardon my retaining my seat, I am sure. You think, then, that we have met before?"

"I am sure of it."

"Will you be good enough to tell me for whom you take me?"

"I know you to be the woman who has wrecked my life and my brother's!" cried Eden, passionately. "You are the wife of Bertram Staunton. You are an adventurer. You are a false, heartless woman, utterly without conscience."

"Don't become so dramatic, child. You can say all those dreadful things in a tone so much quieter and more ladylike. Let me see! You must explain your position here to me somewhat. Of course, I could find out for myself in time; but I don't wish to betray anything by accident that you wish concealed. Does Mr. Marchmont know that your name is not Chasemore, but Carleton? And does he suspect that you were once Bertram Staunton's—?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Eden, with a terrible shudder, lifting her hands as though to ward off a blow. "He knows nothing—nothing!"

Miss Gordon smiled with calm satisfaction.

"You are a sensible girl," she said, in a sort of purring fashion that was maddening to Eden. "Men, and particularly women of Mrs. Marchmont's old-fashioned ideas, are so absurdly particular. Besides, it would be exceedingly unpleasant for Bertram Staunton, not to mention Malcolm Carleton. Of course, you will not speak here of ever having seen me before."

"That depends entirely upon circumstances."

"Circumstances is a word I never liked. It is vague."

"I am about to explain. Although in no-wise interested in your affairs, except so far as they concern those who have been good to me, I must ask your purpose in coming here."

Bertha laughed.

"You think I have one, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, perhaps you are right. If I tell you, is it to be silence for silence?"

"I will answer after I have heard. If there is to be no treachery to either Walter Marchmont or his mother, then for my brother's sake I would say nothing."

"Suppose I should tell you that I am tired of the life I have led, that I have placed myself under my brother's care because I wish to change all that, and that I have come here as an introductory step into society?"

"I would not believe you."

"You would not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because Sir Wilfred Gordon is not your brother. Were he so, he would never have brought you to this country to redeem your past, where you must be known to so many. Yours is a face once seen never forgotten. The man you call a baronet, like yourself, is but an adventurer!"

"How worldly wise you have become, my dear little sister-in-law!" sneered Bertha. "Perhaps you will tell me, then, why I am here?"

"I cannot fathom the depth of your cruelty and wickedness. I will tell you upon what condition I will keep your secret."

"Well?"

"That you leave here at once and for ever."

Bertha's eyes flashed with a venomous green,

her lips drew tightly over her white teeth, and her nervous fingers ripped in fragments a costly bit of lace.

"Otherwise you will tell Walter Marchmont the story of Bertha Staunton?" she asked, dully.

"I will!"

"Do you know what would be the result of that?"

"I care not."

"Nevertheless, let me tell you. As you know, Eden, I have absolutely nothing to lose. Let me impress those words upon you—absolutely nothing! You say Sir Wilfred is not my brother, but an adventurer. Well, granted that be true, it leaves less than nothing. Bertram Staunton was the one man on this earth whom I loved. I would have sacrificed life and soul for him, but he wearied of me and deserted me."

"From that hour I became a desperate woman. I was penniless, helpless, heart-broken; but, instead of drowning myself, as most women would have done, I resolved upon revenge."

"I cared nothing for what I did, or what became of me. The feeling has not changed, except perhaps to intensify. If the gallows loomed before me within the hour, I would slip my head into the noose with a smile."

"Listen to me, Eden, and don't shiver like that. You say if I do not leave here at once you will tell Walter Marchmont the story of my life. Well, then, do it, for I refuse! But let me tell you the consequences before you act so rashly. Do you think I do not know why you left your home and have made your brother believe you dead? It was because you wished to save your name from disgrace, and Bertie Staunton, the man whom you loved even as I have loved him, from gaol."

"Now, listen! Tell this history of mine to the Marchmonts if you will. Within the hour all the world shall know how Malcolm Carleton's sister was wedded to a bigamist, and before the day is over Bertram Staunton will sleep within a prison. That I shall share his fate matters less to me than the death of that poor worm that I crushed beneath my heel."

Eden groaned.

(To be continued next week.)

## TO MEND KID GLOVES

An actual hole in a kid glove cannot be—should never be—drawn together. There are two effective ways of repairing such a place. The most admirable method is that of buttonhole-stitch. For this a fine needle is necessary, fine silk thread the same shade as the kid, and a spirit of leisure and painstaking care. The place is to be nicely buttonholed all around with tiny stitches, just as a buttonhole would be, excepting that the stitches are taken a trifle less closely, perhaps; then, just as if no buttonhole-stitching had been done, it is with the same infinite pains buttonholed again, the second row of stitches being taken one between each stitch in the edge of the first row. Thus two rows are formed, the second circle being, of course, smaller than the first; a third row is then done by catching between the stitches in the edge of the second row. This process is repeated until the ever-narrowing circle ends in the centre of the rent. When well executed, the result is so beautiful that one would almost wish for a break in a glove in order to ornament it with such needlework. Anyone can do such a bit of mending, but a fine needle and thread must again be insisted upon. The shade of the thread must be just the same as that of the kid.

FOR THE CORONATION.—Miss Bragg: "Yes, I'm going to the Coronation. Why not?" Miss Chellus: "Of course you have a right to, if there's any truth in the old proverb." Miss Bragg: "What proverb?" Miss Chellus: "A cat may look at the king."

## A Stylish Hat

What was considered to be a very stylish hat was worn at one of this week's weddings. It was a burnt straw trimmed with black velvet ribbon and clusters of white lilac. This happy combination always looks very becoming with a rosy, healthy complexion. Bile Beans for biliousness provide the latter by removing all digestive troubles, and keeping the liver and kidneys in proper order. At the present season constipation, headache, lassitude, a desire to do nothing, and an all round sense of depression and misery, trouble many girls and women. This is the sign which the system gives of its requirements. It needs toning up for the summer. This work is done by Bile Beans more satisfactorily, speedily, and economically than by any other means; and in home remedies as well as dress, ease, efficiency, and economy should be considered.

## Some Things That Destroy Beauty

The lady pessimist says that most of the lovely things in life are like high-heeled slippers—just darling beautiful, but not a bit good for you.

There is probably no physical feature which gives so much satisfaction to the possessor and delight to the observer as beauty. For this reason every woman who has it not should cultivate it, and though science has not yet attained that degree of perfection whereby the visage may be completely transformed, it has developed many ideas which, if put into execution, will work a marvellous improvement in any woman.

Although it depends upon them to a great degree, beauty is not wholly indebted to cosmetics, lotions, exercise, and one might almost say perfect health, for its full perfection. There are emotions which are almost as destructive to loveliness of feature as disease. The woman who would preserve her beauty, or such a degree of it as she may possess, must be ever vigilant, not only against the attacks of time and circumstance, but against those of mental conditions and tendencies of the disposition.

If there is any one class of women to whom a general beauty warning should be sent, it is to young women just leaving school and entering society, who are apt to have the habit of contorting the features while carrying on a prolonged conversation. In this way foreheads are corrugated, eyes rolled, lips pursed and smacked, noses elevated, and other faults committed that though not noticeable at first, show alarmingly in time, and take longer to cure than to cultivate.

Just as angry passions, strife, envy, jealousy, morbid grief and melancholy leave their devastating impress on the face, so does the contemplation of beautiful ennobling subjects refine and illuminate it, hence the growing effort on the part of mothers to check and control in their daughters—and sons, too—outbursts of temper and sullen expression which in time supplant the sweetness of the disposition and beauty of face.

It has been claimed that real beauty is found in the expression—the spirit shining through the features, rather than in the lovely complexion, fine eye, or perfect contour. If not absolutely true, there is a great deal in the argument that demands consideration, and in nine cases out of ten the most fascinating woman is the one who puts away petty annoyances and trials, especially those which have not yet come upon her—and perhaps never will—and thinks as persistently as possible of the pleasant, happy things that have happened and that she wants to make happen, not forgetting the daily blessings which so many of her fellow-women accept with so little gratitude.

## Gleanings

A LANGUAGE of the sole—Creaking boots.

A UNIVERSALLY-LIKED gallant.—The rain-bow. What most helps and yet most retards a pilgrim? A Bunyan (*bunian*).

WHY should a blockhead be promoted? Because he is equal to any post.

THE KAISER IS A NEW ROLE.—The Kaiser is said to have a habit of pulling his ear when he is annoyed. One of the royal nephews asked him why he did it. "Because I am annoyed," replied the Kaiser. "And when you are very, very much annoyed, what do you do?" persisted the nephew. "Then I pull somebody else's," said his Majesty.

A MODEL COW FOR THE CORONATION.—The Gorakshane Sabha of Nagpur has decided to send a marble picture of an Indian cow as a present to the Emperor of India on the occasion of his Coronation. The cow will carry its own memorial written on blades of grass in its mouth. The Gorakshane Sabha has thus hit upon the most classic way of memorialising the All-Powerful. The mouthful of grass is symbolical of extreme humility and utter resignation.

THE RUSSIAN'S HOLIDAYS.—In the matter of public holidays the Russian workman is perhaps the most fortunate workman in the world. His labour year is dotted at every few steps with oases of idleness and vodka, tempered with an occasional kiss to an ikon. Every English employer of labour in Russia keeps an almanac hanging conspicuously from which are blacked out the days on which work is at a standstill. Even the ship captains who take cargo and passengers to St. Petersburg carry the marked almanac, and hurry or loiter to dodge the Russian holy day.

RUSSIAN POLICE ACTIVITY.—The police force in Russia, like our War Office at home, is the subject of many stories, and the papers find a new joke at its expense nearly every week. A man who was "wanted" in Russia had been photographed in six different positions, and the pictures were duly circulated among the police departments. The chief of one of these wrote to headquarters a few days after the issue of the set of portraits, and stated: "Sir, I have duly received the portrait of the six miscreants whose capture is desired. I have arrested five of them, and the sixth is under observation, and will be secured shortly."

THE HONEYCOMBED CITY.—As showing the extent to which the London streets are honeycombed, it is interesting to note that there are now about one and a half miles of subways under the thoroughfares of the one square mile; that total being exclusive of the subways, to the length of one mile and 661 yards, that are in the City, but are not under the control of the Corporation. The gas, water, and hydraulic mains, the telegraph and pneumatic tubes, and the electric lighting conduits laid in the subways under the control of the Corporation amount to 11½ miles, being an increase of nearly three miles during the year. The electric lighting and telegraph conduits contain some thousands of miles of wires.

HOW ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS ARE COLOURED.—The laboratory where the highly important operations of dyeing and tinting are carried on is the inner sanctum of a master flower-maker's establishment, and its secrets are not readily imparted to outsiders. On one occasion, when, by special favour, I had been admitted to visit one of these laboratories, I was much interested in the manner in which the irregular specklings were obtained on a piece of material intended for making one particular species of orchid. The tissue, to which had already been given its foundation tint, was lying on a flat slab; the operator, with a brush full of colour in his left hand, by means of a sharp tap on its handle with his right sent drops of dye flying over its surface, that seemed to group themselves quite naturally.

To dream of a bear betokens mischief, which your vision shows you is a *bruin*.

READING by lamplight probably accounts for the different "shades of opinion."

WHEN does a rogue think he gets "a drop too much?" When he gets the hangman's.

THE road to success is open to all, but too many want to get there without the trouble of going.

THE ASSISTANCE OF THE MUSE.—The noises of the night has drawn the following from an American poet:—

"The cat that nightly haunts our gate—  
How heartily we hate her!

Some night she'll come and mew till late,  
But we will mu-ti-late her!"

A HOUSE ON WHEELS.—The train the Emperor uses for his journeys in Russia is quite a masterpiece of engineering construction, besides being remarkable for its comfort and taste. It comprises a bedroom furnished in the English fashion and communicating with that of the Empress, which is furnished in the French Empire style. Close by are dressing-rooms and a large bathroom. The grand saloon is supplemented by an adjoining study. There are numerous other smaller saloons. The dining saloon can contain forty persons.

THE PREMIER BARONESS.—The premier Baroness in her own right is the little Baroness Beaumont, aged eight, who is the eleventh "Baron" of her line. She succeeded, in 1895, under very sad circumstances, her father, Lord Beaumont, being killed while shooting. He left her a baby, and a short time after his death a posthumous child, also a daughter, was born to his widow, and therefore the barony fell in abeyance between the two tiny sisters until Queen Victoria exercised her prerogative and settled it upon the elder, Mona Josephine Tempest Stapleton, now Baroness Beaumont. Her little sister, the Hon. Ivy Stapleton, is the heir.

A NOTABLE BIBLE.—Bishop Tugwell has an interesting curiosity in his possession. About 1855 Bishop Crowthor presented to the rulers of Bida an Arabic Bible which, when Bida was taken by the Niger Company's forces in 1897, was found in the palace amongst other treasures, and has since been handed over to Bishop Tugwell. The book has evidently been read and valued, for strong leathern covers and a highly-finished leathern case were made for it when the original covers were worn out.

A CROW HATCHERY.—A man living in Susquehanna County, Penn., has started a crow hatchery, and will make a business of supplying big millinery houses with crows' wings and heads. The hatchery is at present comparatively small, as, owing to the extreme shyness of the birds, the owner has succeeded in capturing and raising only about two hundred of them. But next season he expects to have two thousand on hand. They will be carefully protected from hunters, and liberally fed, so that they will not be tempted to wander from him and pillage the cornfields of farmers in the surrounding country.

OUR QUEEN'S WEDDING RING.—In a recently published life of Queen Alexandra we read the wedding ring selected by the Prince for his bride was massive, and the keeper was set with six precious stones, arranged so that the letters of the names spelled "Bertie"—Beryl, Emerald, Ruby, Turquoise, Lacyth, Emerald. A plain gold wedding ring was also made for the bridegroom and was inscribed with "Alexandra." The Prince gave the bridesmaids crystal lockets with pink pearls and diamond to represent the red and white colours of Denmark. Princess Alice had designed the lockets, and the possessor of one informs me that they were the first crystal lockets ever made. The bridesmaids presented the bride with a diamond and enamel bracelet, divided into eight compartments, in each of which was a portrait of one of the bridesmaids, with her initials in diamonds.

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## Coronation Coiffures

The care of the coiffure was distinctly the fine art of mediæval times, says "The Dressing Table." No period presents variety so endless or extravagance so great as does that which witnessed the sway of the first six Edwards who sat on the throne of England. And the exploitation of the coiffure which did take place then, of course found its greatest outlet in the Coronation ceremonies celebrated at Westminster in an almost unbroken line since the first great Edward and his Queen Eleanor were crowned.

A note of simplicity was struck in the head-tire of Queen Eleanor, whose effigy lies in the Abbey side by side with that of her Royal husband. A low-crowned cap was worn over the hair, gathered up into a caul of golden-coloured network. The more youthful took to a charming style; the hair, hanging in natural ringlets to the shoulders, was confined merely by a fillet, sometimes by a garland of natural or artificial flowers.

Side by side with simpler forms was also to be seen a fashion of the previous reign—the gorget, a head covering which hid up the wearer in much the same way as does the modern nun's dress.

The reign of Edward II. had little to differentiate it from the previous one. The reticulated head-dress first made its appearance, but was more fully developed in the next reign.

Exaggeration had gradually acquired force, until severe sumptuary laws had to be enacted to control both the expense entailed by the fashionable dress of the day and to restrict the very dimensions of articles of the toilet. The plain gold chaplets, which alone adorned the heads of the earlier princesses of the blood royal, begin to show pearls and leaves in addition to the first severely-made circlet. Notwithstanding that the greatest lady in the land—Queen Philippa—before being anointed at her Coronation suffered the bishop to pray that she might be induced "with the simplicity and meekness of the Dove," the magnificence of dress continued unabated.

The long gap between the third and fourth Edwards permitted the development of the most awesome structures as head-coverings. The extinguisher-like, steeple-shaped monstrosities, of which relics still linger in the remoteness of Normandy, flourished in all their glory in the reign of Edward IV. A congregation of women at that time was compared to a forest of cedars, with their heads reaching to the clouds. These huge rolls of linen were sometimes arranged with two butterfly-like projections, sometimes with horned attachments. From these towers hung streamers, ranging from the short puggaree length to the shoulders to those of full length, which extended to the ground behind.

The bachelor King Edward VI. is recognised everywhere by his flat bonnet, with one ostrich feather fastened on the left of the hat-band, a style which has reappeared amid the vagaries of Victorian millinery. A like flatness displayed itself in the coiffure of the ladies of his Court. The diamond-shaped head-dress which we associate with pictures of the Queens of Henry VIII. always concealed hair very plainly dressed. It was not till the zenith of his sister, the great Queen Elizabeth, that we arrive at the huge erections thus described by a contemporary writer:—"Artificial hair, curled, frizzled, and crisped, laid out (a world to see) on wreathes from one ear to the other. And, lest it should fall down, underpropped with forks, wires, and I cannot tell what, like grim, sterner monsters, rather than chaste Christian matrones."

In the coronet which Queen Alexandra will wear during the historic ceremony which only the distinguished of this great Empire will be permitted to witness, will sparkle the Koh-i-noor and the Pitt diamond. Of all the consorts of the seven Edwards who have sat upon the English throne none can ever have worn

with greater charm or borne with a more gracious mien than Queen Alexandra the coronet of this great dominion, for the first time assumed in the full pomp of Imperial circumstance.

## SAWS OF A CYNIC.

Bad temper won't mix with good grub.  
The time to take puddin' is when it's passed to you.

Clothes mostly always wear through in the spot where they're needed most.

The chronic wailer might as well be dumb.  
You get just about what you pay for in this world, my son. Price cuts mighty little figure.

Speakin' of politics, 'twont always do to make light of the dark horse, mind that.

I've heard cannons shoot off, and bomb-shells bust, but I've never heard anything for loudness that equals a titter at a funeral.

If the devil ever dies, they should put on his tombstone the inscription: "He was a fine business man."

## BELINDA.

Belinda's eyes are china blue,  
Belinda's nose is flat,  
Belinda's hair is really hair,  
She wears it in a plait.  
It's true, Belinda's made of rags,  
But what is that to me?  
Because I'm sure her hair must grow—  
Her hair is real, you see.

And when I fasten on her clothes  
And have to use a pin,  
She doesn't mind it in the least,  
How far I stick it in.  
I'm sure she feels it, for although  
She doesn't seem to care,  
There must be something in a doll  
Whose hair is really hair.

## Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

OLIVE.—Olive means "peaceful," literally an olive branch; Augusta the feminine of Augustus, the name of the Roman emperors.

GWILTHYN.—There is no demand for such pictures except when they are done by artists of established reputation. An unknown artist would have to depend upon his personal friends to furnish a market for his crayon sketches.

ERICA.—The Jungfernstieg (The Maiden's Walk) is a fashionable promenade in the city of Hamburg, Germany. It is the broad walk round the sides of a basin of water formed by damming up the small river Alster. In the summer season the river is covered with brightly painted boats, and the scene in the immediate vicinity is one of much animation and gaiety.

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**MIDGET.**—Try the following: Lactic acid, 4 ounces; glycerine, 2 ounces; rosewater, 1 ounce. Apply several times daily with soft, linen cloth, pouring a small quantity of the lotion, as needed, into a saucer. Everything that promotes the activity of the skin tends to remove its blemishes, which are all manifestations of abnormal conditions.

**LUCIA.**—I give you the prescription for an astringent that will draw up and give firmness to the mouth and lips:—Fennel water, 100 grammes; tincture of lignum vite, 13 grammes; tincture of myrrh, 5 grammes; chlorate of potash, 2 grammes. Dissolve the chlorate in the water and add the tinctures, little by little. Dilute with water, and rinse the mouth out frequently.

**SINCERITY.**—The nail-biting habit is one that one's sense of cleanliness should not permit. It is usually the result of nervousness, and for that reason you will be wise to get all the fresh air you can, to go to bed early, and to eat simple food that will build up the general system. When the nibbling sensation takes possession of you, soak your hands in warm Castile suds and then polish and fuss over your finger-nails until the nibbling notion is null and void.

**K. C. B.**—Any complexion that is made unbecomingly by pimples and blackheads will be benefited by the use of green soap—surgeon's soap it is often called. Rub the soft, gelatin-like substance into the skin, then bathe the face with running hot water for fifteen minutes, rinsing for five more with colder water, drying carefully, and applying creme marquisse or cucumber milk. Don't eat pastries, rich salads, strong coffee, pickles, or any greasy, stimulating foods.

**ANXIOUS.**—It would be very rash, indeed, for you to marry a man whom you have known for only four months, and of whose antecedents you are utterly ignorant. It is the duty of your father to make inquiries regarding him in the town in which he spent four years just previous to his taking up his abode in your neighbourhood. The young man may be morally all right, but in a matter involving a woman's lifelong happiness it is best to take no risks.

**EVELYN.**—Skillful massage will do much to make less ugly a protruding upper lip. Place the first finger above the centre of the lip under the nose. Place the thumb at one corner of the mouth, the second finger at the other. Keep the first finger stationary and bring the thumb and second finger up to it. This draws the mouth into a Cupid's bow, strengthens the muscles, and dissolves superfluous tissue. First anoint the fingers with orange-flower skin food or any other good emollient, as this makes massage more effective. Continue treatment for fifteen minutes. Do this twice a day.

**MAE.**—Massage with a good skin food will remove the wrinkles from the corners of your mouth. If you cannot afford to engage the services of an experienced masseuse, try kneading your skin yourself. It is not difficult, and with care may be done very effectively. Let the touch be gentle, though firm, and the movements rotary in a circle that gradually extends outwards and upward. In connection with the massage use the following: Oil of sweet almonds, 3 ounces; oil of bitter almonds, 10 grammes; balsam of tolu, 2 grammes; benzoin, 2 grammes; essence of lemon, 2 drops; essence of cajuput, 2 drops. The resins are powdered and triturated in the oils; keep at a gentle heat for twenty-four hours; then decant from the sediment, and add the essential oils. I know of no more harmless wash to slightly tighten the skin than this: Boil three ounces of pearl barley in a pint of water till the gluten is extracted; strain, and add twenty-five drops of tincture of benzoin. Wash with the barley-water night and morning.

**HELENE.**—The recipe which follows makes a good saponaceous paste for sensitive hands, and can be used instead of soap:—White castile soap, shaved fine,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound; almond paste, 1 pound; carbonate of potassium, 1 ounce; oil of lavender (Mitcham), 1 drachm; oil of citron,  $\frac{1}{4}$  drachm; oil of bergamot, 1 drachm. Blanche the almonds in boiling water, bruise them in a mortar, and put them with the soap in a bain marie to heat, beating all into smooth paste as the soap melts; then add the potassium, and, after the mixture is partially cooled, stir in the oils.

**TIPPERARY BOY.**—It is my aim to be of real service to all readers who care to consult me, but you must understand that in medical matters I can only give general advice and simple remedies, for the obvious reason that a letter describing an ailment can never take the place of a personal examination by a qualified practitioner. In your case I do not regard the "buzzing" of which you complain as serious, but I should think that something more than medicine is required to effect a cure. Just what is wanted can only be decided upon after a careful examination of the ear. I can well understand how it worries you.

**MRS. J.**—To massage the scalp properly first divide the hair in the middle. Place the hands, with all the fingers close together, resting firmly on the scalp, thrust through the loose meshes of hair, pressing firmly, push the fingers forward. Do not push more than a half inch in length, but repeat the movement all over the scalp, until every inch of surface has been treated. Then place the fingers through the hair as before, and rub with a rotary motion, again pressing firmly. The third and last movement is a sort of blow, by which the fingers, stretched apart, are brought sharply down on the scalp, the fingers closing at the time they touch the scalp. Ten minutes will suffice for this exercise, which should be practised daily, and which will show desirable results after three treatments.

**MAX S.**—I give you the recipe for a tonic which may be used on the eyelashes and eyebrows with excellent results:—Lavender vinegar, 24 ounces; glycerine, 14 ounces; fluid extract of jaborandi, 2 drachms. Agitate ingredients until thoroughly incorporated. Apply to the eyebrows with a tiny camel's-hair brush, using the same instrument for the eyelashes. The brush must be freed from any drop, and passed lightly along the edge of the eyelids, exercising extreme care that no minutest portion of the lotion touches the eye itself. The extreme sensitiveness of the conjunctiva, which covers the entire exposed surface of the eye, is the protection nature has given this delicate structure, upon whose perfection so much depends. The growth of the eyelashes is also promoted by clipping them at regular intervals. Purchase a pencil the colour you desire, and use it for darkening the brows and lashes. It is the most effective and harmless means of obtaining the desired result.

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